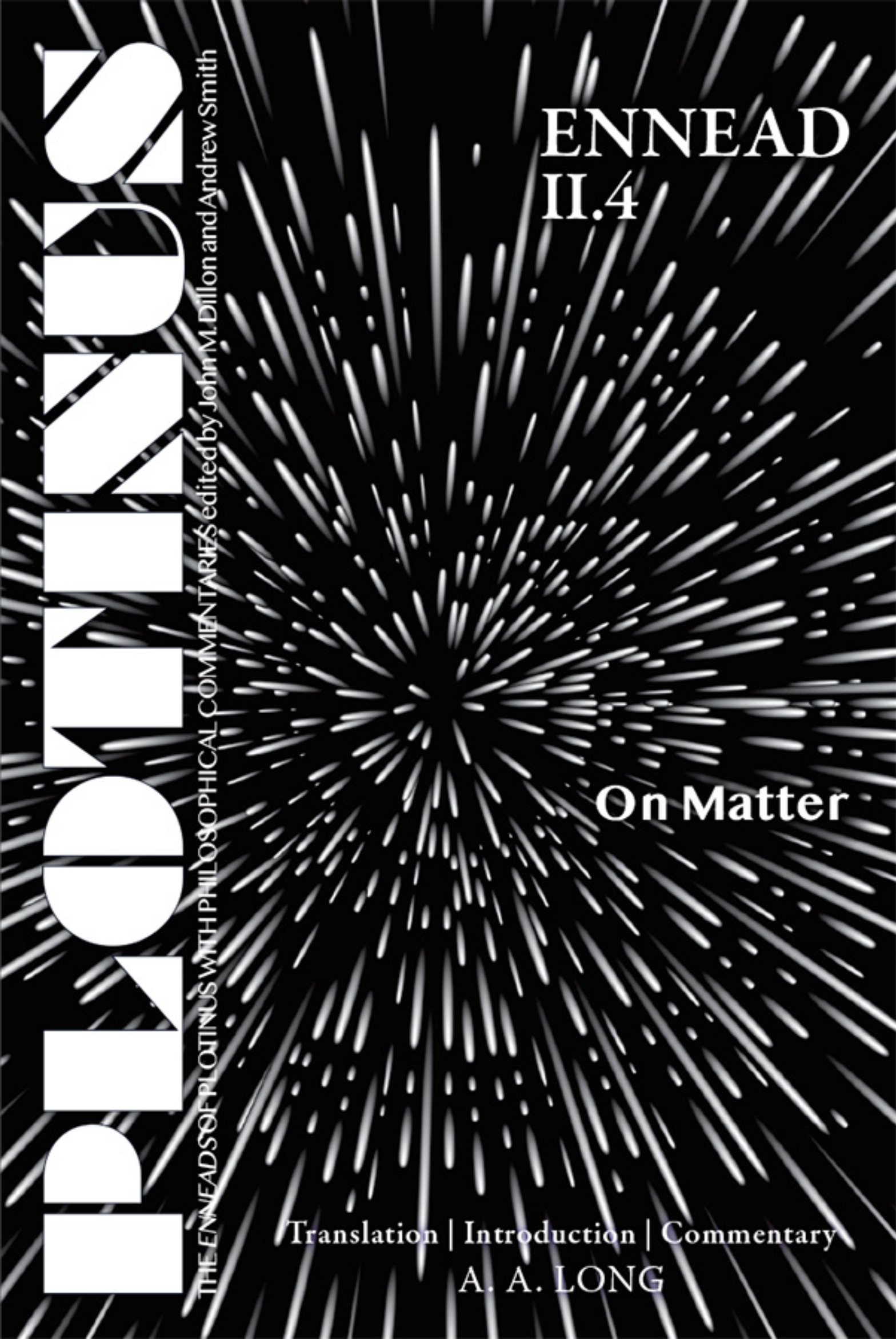
PLOTINUS
THE ENNEADS OF PLOTINUS WITH PHILOSOPHICAL COMMENTARIES edited by John M. Dillon and Andrew Smith
ENNEAD
II.4
On Matter
Translation | Introduction | Commentary
A. A. LONG

PLOTINUS
ENNEAD II.4

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With Philosophical Commentaries

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On Matter

Translation with an Introduction
and Commentary

A. A. LONG

PARMENIDES
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Las Vegas | Zurich | Athens

M. F. B. and M. F.
In memoriam

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Introduction to the Series With a Brief Outline of the Life and Thought of Plotinus (205–270 CE)

Plotinus was born in 205 CE in Egypt of Greek-speaking parents. He attended the philosophical schools in Alexandria where he would have studied Plato (427–347 BCE), Aristotle (384–322 BCE), the Stoics and Epicureans as well as other Greek philosophical traditions. He began his serious philosophical education, however, relatively late in life, at the age of twenty-seven and was deeply impressed by the Platonist Ammonius Saccas about whom we, unfortunately, know very little, but with whom Plotinus studied for some eleven years. Even our knowledge of Plotinus' life is limited to what we can glean from Porphyry's introduction to his edition of his philosophical treatises, an account colored by Porphyry's own concerns. After completing his studies in Alexandria Plotinus attempted, by joining a military expedition of the Roman emperor Gordian III, to make contact with the

Brahmins in order to learn something of Indian thought. Unfortunately Gordian was defeated and killed (244). Plotinus somehow managed to extract himself and we next hear of him in Rome where he was able to set up a school of philosophy in the house of a high-ranking Roman lady by the name of Gemina. It is, perhaps, surprising that he had no formal contacts with the Platonic Academy in Athens, which was headed at the time by Longinus, but Longinus was familiar with his work, partly at least through Porphyry who had studied in Athens. The fact that it was Rome where Plotinus set up his school may be due to the originality of his philosophical activity and to his patrons. He clearly had some influential contacts, not least with the philhellenic emperor Gallienus (253–268), who may also have encouraged his later failed attempt to set up a civic community based on Platonic principles in a ruined city in Campania.

Plotinus' school was, like most ancient schools of philosophy, relatively small in scale, but did attract distinguished students from abroad and from the Roman upper classes. It included not only philosophers but also politicians and members of the medical profession who wished to lead the philosophical life. His most famous student was Porphyry (233–305) who, as a relative latecomer to the school, persuaded him to put into writing the results of his seminars. It is almost certain that we possess most, if not all, of his written output, which represents

his mature thought, since he didn't commence writing until the age of forty-eight. The school seemingly had inner and outer circles, and Plotinus himself was clearly an inspiring and sympathetic teacher who took a deep interest in the philosophical and spiritual progress of his students. Porphyry tells us that when he was suffering from severe depression Plotinus straight away visited him in his lodgings to help him. His concern for others is also illustrated by the fact that he was entrusted with the personal education of many orphans and the care of their property and careers. The reconciliation of this worldly involvement with the encouragement to lead a life of contemplation is encapsulated in Porphyry's comment that "he was present to himself and others at the same time."

The *Enneads* of Plotinus is the edition of his treatises arranged by his pupil Porphyry who tried to put shape to the collection he had inherited by organizing it into six sets of nine treatises (hence the name *"Enneads")* that led the reader through the levels of Plotinus' universe, from the physical world to Soul, Intellect and, finally, to the highest principle, the One. Although Plotinus undoubtedly had a clearly structured metaphysical system by the time he began committing himself to expressing his thought in written form, the treatises themselves are not systematic expositions, but rather explorations of particular themes and issues raised in interpreting Plato and other philosophical texts read in the School. In fact, to achieve his

neat arrangement Porphyry was sometimes driven even to dividing certain treatises (e.g., III.2–3; IV.3–5, and VI.4–5).

Although Plotinus' writings are not transcripts of his seminars, but are directed to the reader, they do, nevertheless, convey the sort of lively debate that he encouraged in his school. Frequently he takes for granted that a particular set of ideas is already familiar as having been treated in an earlier seminar that may or may not be found in the written text. For this reason it is useful for the reader to have some idea of the main philosophical principles of his system as they can be extracted from the *Enneads* as a whole.

Plotinus regarded himself as a faithful interpreter of Plato whose thought lies at the core of his entire project. But Plato's thought, whilst definitive, does according to Plotinus require careful exposition and clarification, often in the light of other thinkers such as Aristotle and the Stoics. It is because of this creative application of different traditions of ancient thought to the interpretation of Plato that Plotinus' version of Platonism became, partly through the medium of later Platonists such as Porphyry, Iamblichus (245–325), and Proclus (412–485), an influential source and way of reading both Plato and Aristotle in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and up to the early 19th century, when scholars first began to differentiate Plato and "Neoplatonism." His thought, too, provided early Christian theologians of the Latin

and particularly of the Byzantine tradition, with a rich variety of metaphysical concepts with which to explore and express difficult doctrinal ideas. His fashioning of Plato's ideas into a consistent metaphysical structure, though no longer accepted as a uniquely valid way of approaching Plato, was influential in promoting the notion of metaphysical systems in early modern philosophy. More recently increasing interest has centered on his exploration of the self, levels of consciousness, and his expansion of discourse beyond the levels of normal ontology to the examination of what lies both above and beneath being. His thought continues to challenge us when confronted with the issue of humanity's nature and role in the universe and of the extent and limitations of human knowledge.

Whilst much of Plotinus' metaphysical structure is recognizably an interpretation of Plato it is an interpretation that is not always immediately obvious just because it is filtered through several centuries of developing Platonic thought, itself already overlaid with important concepts drawn from other schools. It is, nevertheless, useful as a starting point to see how Plotinus attempts to bring coherence to what he believed to be a comprehensive worldview expressed in the Platonic dialogues. The Platonic Forms are central. They become for him an intelligible universe that is the source and model of the physical universe. But aware of Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic Forms as lifeless causes he takes

on board Aristotle's concept of god as a self-thinker to enable him to identify this intelligible universe as a divine Intellect that thinks itself as the Forms or Intelligibles. The doctrine of the Forms as the thoughts of god had already entered Platonism, but not as the rigorously argued identity that Plotinus proposed. Moreover the Intelligibles, since they are identical with Intellect, are themselves actively intellectual; they are intellects. Thus Plato's world of Forms has become a complex and dynamic intelligible universe in which unity and plurality, stability, and activity are reconciled.

Now although the divine Intellect is one it also embraces plurality, both because its thoughts, the Intelligibles, are many and because it may itself be analyzed into thinker and thought. Its unity demands a further principle, which is the cause of its unity. This principle, which is the cause of all unity and being but does not possess unity or being in itself, he calls the One, an interpretation of the Idea of the Good in Plato's *Republic* that is "beyond being" and that may be seen as the simple (hence "one") source of all reality. We thus have the first two of what subsequently became known as the three Hypostases, the One, Intellect, and Soul, the last of which acts as an intermediary between the intelligible and physical universes. This last Hypostasis takes on all the functions of transmitting form and life that may be found in Plato, although Plato himself does not always

make such a clear distinction between soul and intellect. Thus the One is the ultimate source of all, including this universe, which is then prefigured in Intellect and transmitted through Soul to become manifest as our physical universe. Matter, which receives imperfectly this expression, is conceived not as an independently existing counter-principle, a dangerously dualist notion, but is in a sense itself a product of the One, a kind of non-being that, while being nothing specific in itself, nevertheless is not simply not there.

But this procession from an ultimate principle is balanced by a return movement at each level of reality that fully constitutes itself only when it turns back in contemplation of its producer. And so the whole of reality is a dynamic movement of procession and return, except for matter, which has no life of its own to make this return; it is inert. This movement of return, which may be traced back to the force of "love" in Plato or Aristotle's final cause, is characterized by Plotinus as a cognitive activity, a form of contemplation, weaker at each successive level, from Intellect through discursive reasoning to the merest image of rational order as expressed in the objects of the physical universe.

The human individual mirrors this structure to which we are all related at each level. For each of us has a body and soul, an intellect, and even something within us that relates to the One. While it is the nature of soul to give life

to body, the higher aspect of our soul also has aspirations toward intellect, the true self, and even beyond. This urge to return corresponds to the cosmic movement of return. But the tension between soul's natural duty to body and its origins in the intelligible can be, for the individual, a source of fracture and alienation in which the soul becomes over-involved and overwhelmed by the body and so estranged from its true self. Plotinus encourages us to make the return or ascent, but at the same time attempts to resolve the conflict of duties by reconciling the two-fold nature of soul as life-giving and contemplative.

This is the general framework within which important traditional philosophical issues are encountered, discussed and resolved, but always in a spirit of inquiry and ongoing debate. Issues are frequently encountered in several different contexts, each angle providing a different insight. The nature of the soul and its relationship to the body is examined at length (IV) using the Aristotelian distinctions of levels of soul (vegetative, growth, sensitive, rational) whilst maintaining the immortal nature of the transcendent soul in Platonic terms. The active nature of the soul in sense-perception is maintained to preserve the principle that incorporeals cannot be affected by corporeal reality. A vigorous discussion (VI.4 and 5) on the general nature of the relationship of incorporeals to body explores in every detail and in great depth the way in which incorporeals act on body. A universe that is the

product of design is reconciled with the freedom of the individual. And, not least, the time-bound nature of the physical universe and human reason is grounded in the life of Intellect, which subsists in eternity. Sometimes, however, Plotinus seems to break outside the framework of traditional metaphysics: the nature of matter and the One, each as non-being, though in a different sense, strains the terminology and structure of traditional ontology; and the attempt to reconcile the role of the individual soul within the traditional Platonic distinction of transcendent and immanent reality leads to a novel exploration of the nature of the self, the "I."

It is this restless urge for exploration and inquiry that lends to the treatises of Plotinus their philosophical vitality. Whilst presenting us with a rich and complexly coherent system, he constantly engages us in philosophical inquiry. In this way each treatise presents us with new ideas and fresh challenges. And, for Plotinus, every philosophical engagement is not just a mental exercise but also contributes to the rediscovery of the self and our reintegration with the source of all being, the Platonic aim of "becoming like god."

While Plotinus, like Plato, always wishes to engage his audience to reflect for themselves, his treatises are not easy reading, partly no doubt because his own audience was already familiar with many of his basic ideas and, more importantly, had been exposed in his seminars

to critical readings of philosophical texts that have not survived to our day. Another problem is that the treatises do not lay out his thought in a systematic way but take up specific issues, although always the whole system may be discerned in the background. Sometimes, too, the exact flow of thought is difficult to follow because of an often condensed mode of expression.

Because we are convinced that Plotinus has something to say to us today, we have launched this series of translations and commentaries as a means of opening up the text to readers with an interest in grappling with the philosophical issues revealed by an encounter with Plotinus' own words and arguments. Each volume will contain a new translation, careful summaries of the arguments and structure of the treatise, and a philosophical commentary that will aim to throw light on the philosophical meaning and import of the text.

John M. Dillon
Andrew Smith

Abbreviations

Armstrong	Armstrong, A. H. *Plotinus*, Enneads II. 1–9. Cambridge, MA: 1962.
Boys-Stones	Boys-Stones, George. *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC to AD 250*. Cambridge: 2018.
DK	*Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed. Edited by H. Diels and W. Kranz. Berlin: 1952.
DL	*Diogenes Laertius*. Edited by T. Dorandi. Cambridge: 2013.
Dox Gr	*Doxographi Graeci*. Edited by H. Diels, 4th edition. Berlin: 1965.

Gerson Gerson, Lloyd P., ed. *Plotinus, The Enneads*. Translated by G. Boys-Stones, John M. Dillon, Lloyd P. Gerson, R. A. H. King, Andrew Smith, and James Wilberding. Cambridge: 2018.

Kalligas Kalligas, Paul. *The Enneads of Plotinus. A Commentary*, Vol. 1. Princeton: 2014.

LS Long, A. A. and D. N. Sedley. *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Volume 1: Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary*. Cambridge: 1987.

MacKenna MacKenna, Stephen. *Plotinus. The Enneads*. Abridged with an Introduction and notes by John Dillon. Harmondsworth: 1991.

Narbonne Narbonne, Jean-Marc. *Plotin. Les Deux Matières [Ennéade II, 4 (12)]*. Paris: 1998.

Perdikouri Perdikouri, Eleni. *Plotin, Traité 12. I1, 4. Introduction, traduction, Commentaires et notes*. Paris: 2014.

SVF Von Arnim, H., ed. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. Leipzig: 1903–1905.

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Introduction to the Treatise

This treatise, called *On Matter* in the MSS of the *Enneads*, is designated *On the Two Matters* in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* (4.45). The longer description fits the work's division into a first part that treats the matter of intelligible beings, and a second and lengthier part that explores the matter of the physical world. *On matter*, however, in its brevity, suits Plotinus' recognition that the two kinds of matter have enough in common to fall under a single term. As modern translators, we are not obliged to choose between these titles, but for the sake of simplicity I opt for *On Matter*, which is how the work is most commonly known. Porphyry placed the treatise in the second *Ennead*, "which includes works concerned with the physical universe" (24.37).

From Porphyry (4.66) we also learn that this is one of Plotinus' earliest essays. Major works that preceded it,

according to his numeration and chronology, include I.6 *On Beauty*, V.9 *On Intellect, the Forms, and Being*, IV.8 *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies*, VI.9 *On the Good or the One,* and V.1 *On the Three Primary Hypostases.* We may assume that the original readers of *On Matter* were drawn from the inner circle of Plotinus' students, and thus familiar with the principal ideas already presented in these essays. Plotinus could accordingly gesture to the One, the Forms, and the distinction between the worlds of "here" (perceptibles) and "there" (intelligibles), as he does, without needing to expound these basic notions afresh. Matter, however, though mentioned very negatively in V.1 (see Chapters 2, 27, and 7, 32), was not defined and discussed in these earlier essays. Making good on that omission can explain why Plotinus decided to devote an entire essay to presenting his full account of matter, no doubt in response to questions from his students.

Very probably his students were already acquainted with relevant texts from Plato's dialogues, especially the cosmological sections of the *Timaeus*, and passages of the *Phaedo*, *Sophist,* and *Philebus*. Such familiarity, which Plotinus seems to take for granted, is essential for understanding the arguments of *On Matter*. Highly desirable, if not equally essential, would have been a grasp of Aristotle's treatment of matter in the *Physics, Metaphysics*, and *On Coming-to be and Passing Away.* Without ever naming their author, Plotinus draws on

these works constructively in Chapter 6 for his account of the inter-dependence of matter and form and for the doxography of the Presocratics in Chapter 7. He works out his final account of matter as privation by means of an intense survey and refutation of Aristotle's discussion in the last chapters of *Physics* book 1.

Plotinus summarizes and criticizes the Stoics—explicitly in Chapter 1 and intermittently and implicitly in some later chapters. Unnamed philosophers who have also left a clear mark on his account include the Middle Platonists Metrodorus and Numenius. The influence of many others as well can be suspected, including the Peripatetic Alexander of Aphrodisias and Platonists closer to the time of Plato himself.

On Matter, then, is not an elementary work. It asks a lot of its readers and interpreters. In return, it amply repays close study. To set the scene, I sketch salient moments in the history of matter, as it emerges first in Plato and Aristotle, then in a fused and transformed guise in Stoicism, and finally as it makes its way to pre-Plotinian Platonism with an infusion of Pythagorean notions. I conclude the Introduction with some thoughts about the character of the essay as a sustained dialectical encounter between Plotinus and the interlocutor(s) with whom he often imagines himself conversing.

The Genealogy of Plotinus' Notion of Matter

Here, in tabular form, are twelve texts, ranging in date from the fourth century BCE to the late second century CE. Reference will be made to most of them in the Commentary.

A. Plato, *Timaeus 50b–51b.*

> That nature which receives all the bodies . . . has never in any way whatever taken on any characteristic similar to any of the things that enter it . . . This is the reason why we shouldn't call the mother or receptacle of what has come to be, of what is visible or perceptible in every other way, either earth or air, fire or water, or any of their compounds or their constituents. But if we speak of it as an invisible and characterless sort of thing, one that receives all things and shares in a most perplexing way in what is intelligible, a thing extremely difficult to comprehend, we shall not be misled [trans. Zeyl (2000), 39–40].

B. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.6, 988a8–14.

> It is evident what the underlying matter is, of which the Forms are predicated [for Plato] . . . viz. that this is a dyad, the great and the small.

C. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7.3, 1029a20–26.

> By matter I mean that which in itself is neither a particular thing nor of a certain quantity nor assigned to any other of the categories by which being is determined . . . The ultimate substrate is neither positively characterized nor yet negatively, for negations also will belong to it only incidentally.

D. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle, De anima*, 3, 27ff., Bruns.

> Absolute matter is a shapeless and amorphous nature with no delineation according to its own account.

E. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quaestiones* 52. 28–53.1, Bruns.

> The essence for matter would not consist in being qualified, but in having a capacity and power, which make it receptive of qualities; absence of quality is incidental to it without constituting its being.

F. Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle, Physics* I.2, 184b15, Diels.

> Theophrastus says: "Plato wishes to make the principles two in number, the one a substrate, in the role of matter, which he calls 'all receiving'; the other, as cause and motive agent, which he connects with the power of God and the Good."

G. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 3.69.

> Plato posited two universal principles, god and matter, and he calls god mind and cause. He holds that matter is shapeless and unlimited,

and that composite things come into being out of it.

H. Diogenes Laertius, ibid. *7*.134 (LS 44B).

The Stoics think that there are two principles of the universe, that which acts, and that which is acted upon. That which is acted upon is unqualified substance, i.e. matter; that which acts is the reason in it, i.e. god. This latter, since it is everlasting, manufactures every single thing throughout all matter.

I. Calcidius, *On Plato's Timaeus* 293 (LS 44E).

According to the Stoics, the body of the universe is limited, one, whole, and substance . . . the primary matter of all bodies . . . it is without quality, passive throughout, and subject to change. But while it changes, it does not perish, either as a whole or by the destruction of its parts.

J. Cicero, *Academica* 1. 27.

> They [the Platonists according to Antiochus] hold that underlying all things is a kind of matter, entirely formless and devoid of all quality, and that out of it all things have been formed and produced so that this matter can in its totality receive all things and undergo every sort of transformation throughout every part of it.

K. Aetius 1.3, Diels, *Doxographi,* 281.

> According to Pythagoras, the principles comprise the Monad and the indefinite Dyad. The former is the efficient and formative cause, which is Intellect and God, while the latter is the passive and material cause, which is the visible universe.

L. Moderatus reported by Porphyry via Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics* 230.36–231.22 (Boys-Stones 4B).

> Plato [following the Pythagoreans] declares that the first One is above being and all substance; he says that the second One,

> the "truly being" and "intelligible," is the forms; and that the third, which relates to the soul, partakes in the One and the forms. Finally, after this comes perceptible nature—which does not partake in them, although it acquires order by reflecting them. Matter in perceptibles is the shadow of non-being in what has quantity, first of all—but extends even further down than that. . . [it was called] quantity not in the sense of having some form, but due to privation, dissolution, extension, fragmentation, as diversion away from being. By these designations, you can see that matter is evil, insofar as it is in retreat from the good. Yet it is also constrained by it, and cannot escape its limits.

The common factor in all these passages is the presumption that cosmology requires in its inventory a completely amorphous and passive entity as the *substrate* and *recipient* of *forms.* Appropriately, that account of matter is the generic way with which Plotinus begins his own essay. Plato had adumbrated this notion in his account of the Receptacle (text A). But it was Aristotle (text C) who influentially called it "matter," drawing metaphorically on the standard Greek word for building material (*hulê*), and complementing Receptacle with "substrate" for the

persistent factor in his analysis of perceptible changes. Thereafter, though not in Aristotle himself, this pair of terms is widely treated as a hendiadys.

The primary contexts for philosophers, when they referenced matter, were accounts of physical phenomena. That could lead one to suppose that matter itself must be a bodily entity; for how else could it be named after timber, and be that "out of which" bodily things are made?[1] Aristotle's "material cause" is typically an explanation of the corporeal source of some phenomenal substance. Plotinus conforms to that model of matter in Chapter 6 of our essay, where he follows Aristotle in treating particular bodies as composites of matter and form. Yet it was only the Stoics and Stoicizing Platonists who made matter, just by itself, a corporeal entity (texts I and J). While the matter that Aristotle and Plotinus treat as the substrate of particular substances is corporeal, for instance the gold material of a drinking vessel, that matter is itself the form of a still simpler body. Gold is only proximate matter, because there must be something more primitive that underlies it. Aristotle probably thought that this further something was itself corporeal, being composed of some arrangement of the four elementary bodies, but he also

1 Our word "matter" is taken from Latin *materia*, also meaning wood or timber, and deriving that name from *mater* in the sense of *mother* earth. Plato pioneered the parental metaphor by likening his Receptacle to mother (*Timaeus* 50d, 51a).

envisioned, if only in theory, an "absolute matter" or an "ultimate substrate" (texts C and D). This most basic and amorphous entity, like Plato's Receptacle, would not be a body but purely the container or the potentiality for bodily occupancy. This notion, in some texts called "prime" matter, is the one that Plotinus' essay most fully explores.

He challenges his readers (in Chapters 8–12) to ask which is the better idea of prime matter—the Stoic concept of a *bodily* substrate so plastic that it can incorporate all physical shapes and sizes, or the Platonists' notion (endorsed by himself) of an *incorporeal* recipient of the volume and extension necessary to any physical phenomenon. A similarly basic disagreement attends the conceptions of formative agents that provide matter with definite form or the semblance of form. According to Stoicism, this agent, itself a body, is a principle called *logos*, otherwise known as the god or cause (text I) that interpenetrates amorphous matter and works on it from within. In Plotinus' version of Platonism, the formative agents, also known as *logoi*, are derivatives via Soul of divine Intelligence. But their agency is not immanent in matter, as it was in Stoicism; it is a projection and reflection on prime matter (as in text L), which itself remains completely unaffected. Plotinus adamantly distances his notion from the Aristotelian conception of proximate matter, particularly its being a potentiality for the contrary instantiations of either form or the privation of form.

Moderatus (text L) adumbrated the position that Plotinus endorses at the end of his essay—matter as absolute "privation, dissolution, extension, fragmentation, a diversion away from being, and evil."

By this time Stoics and Platonists were thoroughly opposed on the issue of matter's physical and metaphysical nature, with Aristotelians lying somewhere in between. It had not always been so. As early as Theophrastus (text E), the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus* could be paraphrased as a doctrine of two universal principles, "the one a substrate, in the role of matter, which he calls 'the all receiving,' the other, as cause and motive agent, which he connects with the power of God and the Good."[2] The Hellenistic outline of Plato's philosophy provided by Diogenes Laertius (text G) parrots Theophrastus, more or less. But text G, especially its reference to *shapeless* and *unlimited* matter, is also quite similar to Diogenes' account of the two Stoic principles, god and matter (text H).

The similarity is hardly coincidental or the result of tendentious reporting by the doxographical tradition. During the third through first centuries BCE doctrinal Platonism was in abeyance, as the Academy embraced the radical skepticism inaugurated by Arcesilaus. In effect, though not in name, the Stoic philosophers of this period became the torchbearers of Plato's cosmology.[3]

2 The paraphrase collapses Plato's Forms and Form copies, his first and second "kinds" (*Timaeus* 49e) into the thoughts and powers of God. Middle Platonists followed suit; see Dillon (1977), 128 and 161.

3 See Reydam-Schils (1999) and Dillon (2003).

They rejected the suprasensible reality of Forms and transcendent divinity, but their god and matter were *embodied* descendants of Plato's *incorporeal* Demiurge and Receptacle, and they played analogous cosmological roles. This synthesis became strikingly evident in the Platonism of Antiochus whose theory of matter, reported by Cicero in text J, is pure Stoicism.

By the time of Plotinus, and probably long before, Antiochus had become a largely forgotten figure. His undisguised appropriation of Stoic doctrines proved to be such an aberration that later Platonists, such as Plutarch, presented themselves as unremitting critics of the Stoa and rarely mention his name. Such hostility, however, could not disguise the similarity between the two schools' notions of matter as amorphous substrate, an affinity that Plotinus himself grudgingly grants in Chapter 5.

Quite apart from Stoicism, a further contributor to matter's genealogy was now coming to the fore in the shape of Pythagoreanism. Plato himself had taken a strong interest in the metaphysical promise of early Pythagorean number theory and in Pythagorean deployment of such opposites as odd, even, limit, and unlimited, for analysis of the world's basic building blocks. In his so-called "unwritten" doctrines Plato posited two principles as the "elements" of the Forms—the One, as determining agent, and as opposite and material principle, the Indefinite Dyad, calling the latter "the Great-and-Small" (text B).[4] At the

4 See Dillon (2003), 18ff., for details.

time of Antiochus, Neo-Pythagoreanism was emerging both as a distinct philosophical option and as a powerful influence on Middle Platonism. The dual principles, Monad and Dyad, which these philosophers espoused, are represented in text K, where the description of the Dyad continues to echo the Stoics' passive principle also called matter.

Middle Platonists, such as Plutarch and Numenius, were metaphysical dualists even if they regarded the Monad as the Good and primary principle and the Dyad as only its offshoot.[5] In their systems the Dyad, in its irrationality, is the source of the perceptible world's disorder and of the badness of matter.[6] Such dualism may seem to be a plausible premise to explain a universe stratified into good and evil, but it does not seem to have tempted Plotinus. Owing to his uncompromising monism and antipathy to Gnosticism, he did not countenance the Dyad as a principle, much less as something that could operate as an independent source of evil. In his Platonism, everything, including matter, must have its ultimate source in the incomparable goodness of the One.[7] How then, could matter, as he finally argues, be both an essential

5 See Dillon (1977), 204 and 373.

6 See Boys-Stones texts 4OPQR.

7 Karamanolis (2006), 208ff., reviews the case for viewing Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus' revered mentor, as a monist who may have taken issue with Numenius.

constituent of embodied reality and also a thoroughly bad non-entity? That is the most demanding question for his readers. How Plotinus guides his preferred responses to it throws much light on the ways he has crafted this work.

The Structure of *On Matter*

The chapters of the treatise are organized as follows:

1 Preamble
2–5 Intelligible Matter
6–16 Perceptible/Physical Matter:
- 6–8 Preliminaries
- 9–12 Size-less recipient of magnitude
- 13–16 Indefinite, unlimited and privative substrate

Plotinus begins the essay with a survey of the agreements and disagreements between unnamed philosophers concerning the notion of matter. He tacitly indicates that he accepts their shared account of it as a "substrate and receptacle of forms." The disagreements concern, first, matter's corporeality or incorporeality, and second, its unity. He describes the proponents of corporeal matter, who are clearly Stoics, with contempt. The disagreement concerning unity is more esoteric because it presupposes a Platonist's distinction between the world of intelligible

Forms and the physical world of perceptible bodies. Matter's pertinence to the latter is uncontroversial, but could there be a further matter, serving as substrate of the incorporeal Forms?

This preamble is less innocent than it may appear at first reading. Three points in particular should be noted. First, the peremptory dismissal of the corporeal option will come back to haunt Plotinus in Chapters 8–12. These are clever and stimulating pages, but they also play into a Stoic's hands with their claim that unquantified and incorporeal matter can be the foundation of perceptible bodies. Plotinus would have done better to probe the Stoic notion that prime matter is an entirely amorphous body. Rather than challenging that difficult notion, he lays himself open to the charge that he has arbitrarily and unconvincingly dismissed corporeal matter.

A second weakness of this opening salvo is Plotinus' unargued acceptance of substrate and receptacle as the correct account of matter, together with the postulate (made explicit at the beginning of Chapter 2) that matter is something "indefinite and shapeless." To be sure, these terms were given in matter's genealogy, but there were viable alternatives, as he himself indicates in his perfunctory treatment of Empedocles and the Atomists in Chapter 7. If matter signifies the physical foundation of perceptible substances, Empedocles' elements and

the atoms of Democritus and Epicurus deserved a more thoughtful response than he offers.

The third point to mention is the abruptness and speed with which Plotinus turns to the recherché questions concerning the second kind of incorporeal matter. Novices would surely have preferred the account of perceptible matter that Plotinus provides in Chapter 6. Why does he not defer the discussion of intelligible matter?

Intelligible Matter, 2–5

Actually, his order of treatment proves to be well motivated. Anticipating resistance to the very idea of intelligible matter, he marshals a series of objections to it, and then lets his defense of it unfold as a rebuttal of these problems one by one. This procedure enables him to explain what the two matters have in common, as substrates of their respective forms, how they stand to one another as archetype and image, and how they differ in value and authenticity. Plotinus concludes this section by commenting on intelligible matter's origin and on the determinacy it derives from its union with the Forms. These observations prepare for the negativity he ascribes to perceptible matter at the end of the treatise.

The Indefinite Dyad of earlier Platonism has clearly influenced Plotinus in this section, but he makes no

reference to it. This reticence fits his uncompromising monism. For the most part his exposition of intelligible matter appears to be original. There are no clear antecedents for the way he makes it the foil for his subsequent analysis of perceptible matter. Although this section suffers from compression, it is one of the most interesting parts of the essay.

There are, however, conceptual weaknesses. The matter of perceptibles is an ineliminable feature of any Platonist's universe. It is always *here* in its own right, so to speak, making the physical world irreducibly complex in its structure of matter and form. Intelligible matter, by contrast is not a metaphysically distinct entity. Originally derivative from the One, it actually *is* the world of Being and Form and Intellect. Its status as "prior" to them is a difference that is never *actual* because matter is an inseparable and integral aspect of the intelligible world. Plotinus alludes to the One at the end of Chapter 5 in his mention of "the first." He returns to it briefly in Chapters 15 and 16, where he draws his final contrasts between the two matters.

Could there be a useful role for intelligible matter beyond Plotinus' Platonism? I have wondered whether it could be interpreted as an analogue to mathematical set theory. Plotinus' Forms need matter as the foundation that they all share in being forms. Thus, numerals or letters or musical notes or any nameable aggregate is a set,

which has an identity that makes it more than the sum of its parts, for example, the alphabet, the diatonic scale, or the number series from one to infinity.

Another way to think of intelligible matter would be to recast its generic antecedents, Otherness and Motion, as the foundations of discursive thought. Thus, for instance, we cannot begin to formulate any statement without a subject and a predicate. The subject and predicate must be different, so as to avoid tautology, and they must be separated or moved apart in the articulation of a sentence. In this way we could perhaps think of intelligible matter as the precondition of any proposition and its linguistic expression. For in Plotinus' extraordinary world of self-thinking Forms, Otherness and Motion think both themselves and one another.

Perceptible/Physical Matter

Plotinus begins his account of perceptible matter with a pair of chapters that he drew either directly from Aristotle or from an epitome of Aristotle's physics. Matter, as he begins to present it here (Chapter 6), is entirely a substrate, and not yet (as it he will later explain) a receptacle, of forms. It includes both the proximate material of ordinary objects and the indefinite substrate (prime matter) of the four elements. Notably absent from his paraphrase of Aristotle is matter's status as potentiality. This omission prepares

the way for the final assessment of matter's irremediable privation and poverty (Chapter 16).

Breaking the flow of this preliminary account, Plotinus next provides a doxographical interlude (Chapter 7). With material also derived largely from Aristotle, he outlines and dismisses four theories of the world's basic constituent(s). These theories are all pre-Platonic in origin, though Plotinus probably includes the Epicureans among the atomists. The theories hardly fit the notions of a material substrate, but Aristotle had treated their proponents as precursors, which must be why Plotinus incorporates them here.

Plotinus breaks into his own stride in Chapter 8. Positing three attributes of the Stoics' prime matter—"unitary, continuous, and without quality"—he completely rejects the Stoic axiom that matter is bodily and quantitative. These attributes are excluded, he argues, owing to matter's absence of all perceptible qualities. In order to be receptive to any form whatever, matter needs to be "destitute of everything," even including magnitude. The insistence that matter has no magnitude is the most original, intriguing and problematic aspect of Plotinus' theory. It not only contradicts Stoicism, it also goes beyond anything that Plato says about the Receptacle or that Aristotle requires of a substrate. Plotinus devotes much of the next four chapters to justifying his doctrine and rebutting objections to it from imaginary interlocutors.

For the course of his argument, I direct readers to the Synopsis and the Commentary. An ancillary point of great interest is his discussion in Chapter 10 of how to think about matter's absence of quality and magnitude. This excursus into psychology and epistemology reminds us that Plotinus does not bifurcate his world view into inner and outer, or thoughts and objects. The material substrate is not a thing that we can perceive in its darkness and intrinsic lack of form and definition. We can try to abstract matter from form, and "think an obscure thing unthinkingly," but our souls project shape onto it "because we cannot bear to linger in non-being." Such pathos and yearning make Plotinus, for all his dependence on Aristotle, the quintessential heir of Plato. It is Aristotle, however, who will chiefly hold his attention in the last pages of *On Matter*.

By the end of Chapter 12 Plotinus takes himself to have finally dispersed the Stoic notion of corporeal matter. He now returns to the "indefinite" character of perceptible matter that he adumbrated at the beginning of this section. Taking his cue from Aristotle's statement that "the ultimate substrate is neither positively characterized nor yet negatively" (text C above), Plotinus dismisses the notion that matter's "privation" could render it "qualified" by negation. Aristotle had argued that privation and proximate matter are only contingently identical because matter is equally the substrate of form. In response Plotinus argues

that all matter is essentially privation by virtue of being indefinite, unlimited, and unqualified.

The argument is an elaborate instance of Plotinian dialectic. As a commentator, I found it the most intricate and difficult passage in the entire essay. From a literary perspective it is chiefly interesting for its peremptory questions and answers. Plotinus goes back and forth, drawing distinctions that often seem petty and pedantic but accumulate into an edifice that is remarkable in its remorseless intensity. Is it good as philosophy? Let the reader judge, while keeping in mind that Plotinus and Aristotle seem to be essentially at cross purposes. For Aristotle, the matter that is only contingently privation is the proximate matter of ordinary objects, for example, the bronze that is not now, but could in principle become, a statue. Aristotle's "ultimate substrate"—his matter as such—is neither privation nor form, though in any particular instance it is either one or the other. Plotinus, because he withholds potentiality from matter in this essay, takes it to be *only* and always privation. His conception of matter's "not-being" or "otherness" imports quite un-Aristotelian ideas.

Was Plotinus cognizant of that? I am not sure. His essay's final chapter continues to echo Aristotle and it also gestures to Plato. But in tone and conclusion the voice here, by turns melancholy and optimistic, is pure Plotinus. The physics and metaphysics of matter remind us that we are

amphibious creatures, positioned between the intelligible world of Beauty and Being and the physical realm that lacks that foundation. Matter here is not-being, but that privation is not a consequence of nihilism or malevolent agency. It is due to matter's sheer difference from the formative powers and values of mental life.

This essay is Plotinus' fullest account of matter, but it was not his last word on the subject. In II.5 and III.6, dated 25 and 26 respectively by Porphyry in his *Vita Plotini,* Plotinus returns to matter. In II.5.5 he presents matter as "nothing in actuality but everything potentially." This reads like a postscript or supplement to our essay where, as I emphasize, there is no explicit attachment of Aristotelian potentiality to matter. Here Plotinus corrects that surprising omission. He also takes the opportunity to amplify his earlier remarks about matter's phantasmagoric status, saying: "If it is necessary for it to be, it is necessary for it to be non-being in actuality so that, having departed from true being, it may have its being in non-being" (trans. Arruzza (2015), 60). In III.6.6–19, where he again treats matter's lack of magnitude and illusory appearances, the chief novelty, as reflected in the essay's title, is matter's complete impassibility. This feature too is entirely compatible with II.4, but in the later essay Plotinus spells it out at length. He also gives a full commentary on Plato's account of the Receptacle in the *Timaeus*.

In VI.3.2–8 Plotinus includes matter along with form, substance, and body in an inventory of the contents of the perceptible world. He describes perceptible form as "a kind of life and perfection of matter, which comes to it from elsewhere without matter owning it" because it is "pulled into all sizes and gets its shapes from outside"; it is "utterly irrational, a shadow of rational form"; "sterile and inadequate to be being, a shadow on a shadow, a picture, and a seeming." These descriptions of matter are hardly complementary, but they do not call it ugly and bad, as Plotinus does at the end of our essay.

I argue in the Commentary that even these aesthetic and ethical terms do not make matter "evil" in a sense that imports moral judgement or blame as distinct from metaphysical deficiency. A different notion may seem to be offered in I.8.14 where Plotinus characterizes matter as "darkening the soul" and "causing the soul's weakness and badness." That context is replete with metaphor and personification. Here is not the place to offer an interpretation of this rather sad essay, written at the end of Plotinus' life. I mention it mainly for the sake of completeness, but also because I don't think that it passes a judgment on matter that is seriously inconsistent with ideas in II.4. The badness of matter is what it lacks, not what it has or what it does.[8]

8 See Long (2016), 47.

Note on the Greek Text

Line numbers in the translation are approximate and do not always match the original Greek text. Since the commentary follows the sequence of the English translation, there may sometimes be a slight discrepancy in the ordering.

The Greek text adopted is that of the Oxford edition, that is, the *editio minor* (for comparison between readings in HS_1 and HS_2 see vol. 3, xiii–xiv). Deviations from the text are noted in the commentary.

Each *Ennead* is referred to by Roman numerals, followed by the number of the treatise, the chapter of the treatise, and, finally, separated by a comma, the line number or numbers, for example, VI.8.8, 24–27, that is, *Ennead* VI, treatise number 8, Chapter 8, lines 24–27.

It is customary to add the chronological number given by Porphyry in his *Life of Plotinus* (*Vita Plotini*), so that, for example, VI.8 is designated VI.8 [39], that is, *Ennead* VI.8 is 39th in the chronological order. So we adopt the convention as follows: either VI.8.8, 1–5 (where

the chronological number is not given) or VI.8 [39] 8, 1–5 (where it is given).

In this series the chronological number is given only in the Introduction and in other places where it may be of significance for understanding the chronological presentation of Plotinus' philosophical stance. The following chart indicates the chronological order.

Chronological Order of the *Enneads*

Enn.		*Enn.*		*Enn.*		*Enn.*		*Enn.*		*Enn.*	
I.1	**53**	II.1	**40**	III.1	**3**	IV.1	**21**	V.1	**10**	VI.1	**42**
I.2	**19**	II.2	**14**	III.2	**47**	IV.2	**4**	V.2	**11**	VI.2	**43**
I.3	**20**	II.3	**52**	III.3	**48**	IV.3	**27**	V.3	**49**	VI.3	**44**
I.4	**46**	II.4	**12**	III.4	**15**	IV.4	**28**	V.4	**7**	VI.4	**22**
I.5	**36**	II.5	**25**	III.5	**50**	IV.5	**29**	V.5	**32**	VI.5	**23**
I.6	**1**	II.6	**17**	III.6	**26**	IV.6	**41**	V.6	**24**	VI.6	**34**
I.7	**54**	II.7	**37**	III.7	**45**	IV.7	**2**	V.7	**18**	VI.7	**38**
I.8	**51**	II.8	**35**	III.8	**30**	IV.8	**6**	V.8	**31**	VI.8	**39**
I.9	**16**	II.9	**33**	III.9	**13**	IV.9	**8**	V.9	**5**	VI.9	**9**

	Enn.		*Enn.*		*Enn.*		*Enn.*		*Enn.*		*Enn.*
1	I.6	**10**	V.1	**19**	I.2	**28**	IV.4	**37**	II.7	**46**	I.4
2	IV.7	**11**	V.2	**20**	I.3	**29**	IV.5	**38**	VI.7	**47**	III.2
3	III.1	**12**	II.4	**21**	IV.1	**30**	III.8	**39**	VI.8	**48**	III.3
4	IV.2	**13**	III.9	**22**	VI.4	**31**	V.8	**40**	II.1	**49**	V.3
5	V.9	**14**	II.2	**23**	VI.5	**32**	V.5	**41**	IV.6	**50**	III.5
6	IV.8	**15**	III.4	**24**	V.6	**33**	II.9	**42**	VI.1	**51**	I.8
7	V.4	**16**	I.9	**25**	II.5	**34**	VI.6	**43**	VI.2	**52**	II.3
8	IV.9	**17**	II.6	**26**	III.6	**35**	II.8	**44**	VI.3	**53**	I.1
9	VI.9	**18**	V.7	**27**	IV.3	**36**	I.5	**45**	III.7	**54**	I.7

Synopsis

Chapter 1—Preamble: Corporeal, incorporeal, and intelligible matter.

1–6 "Matter" (*hulê*) signifies a sort of "substrate" and "receptacle" of "forms."

This is the opinion of most philosophers, but they disagree about the application of these terms.

6–14 According to those who identify beings with bodies [i.e., Stoics], matter itself is a body, and everything else including the elements and divinity are states of matter.

14–18 Others [i.e., Platonists and Peripatetics] take matter to be incorporeal, regarding it as underlying bodies. Some of this group posit a prior and different matter that underlies the intelligible forms and incorporeal substances.

Chapter 2—Problems concerning intelligible matter.

1–2 Does this kind of matter exist and, if so, what is it like?

2–12 These questions raise many problems. If matter in the perceptible world is indefinite, shapeless, and necessary to composite and changeable bodies, what role could matter serve in the intelligible world of incorporeal, simple, eternal, and changeless Forms, and how could it arise?

Chapter 3—Resolution of the problems raised in Chapter 2.

1–5 Indefiniteness is not always a blemish. It can, as in the relation of Soul to Intellect and Reason, facilitate a thing's being shaped into a superior form.

5–9 The items of the intelligible world *are* composite in a certain sense.

9–16 Yet their matter, unlike that of embodied things, always has the same form. It is complete and has nothing to change into. Neither kind of matter is simply shapeless, though the way shape pertains to each of them is different.

16–17 The question of matter's eternity or origin will be settled in due course.

Chapter 4—Positive arguments concerning the existence and nature of intelligible matter.

1–7 Assuming the existence of supra-sensible Forms, intelligible matter is necessary to serve as their substrate and common property, and as the recipient of their individual shapes.

7–11 The perceptible world is a composite of matter and form. Since it is a copy of the intelligible world, the latter too must be composite and contain matter as the recipient of its Forms.

11–21 The intelligible world is both one and many. Its multiple shapes require containment in something that is unitary and shapeless prior to being shaped.

Chapter 5—Similarity and difference between intelligible and perceptible matter.

1–4 The unity and completeness of the intelligible world do not imply that it lacks matter.

4–12 Intellect discovers the duality of matter and form by dividing things until it reaches a depth that is no longer luminous. This darkness is matter.

12–23 Intelligible matter acquires definition and life from the Forms that overlie it. But the matter of perceptible things underlies mere images and so their matter is only an embellished corpse.

24–37 Intelligible matter is made by the eternal Otherness and Motion. These principles, when they originate from the First, are indefinite. They become definite when they turn back to it. Likewise, matter is indefinite before it is illuminated. The light that it gets is other than itself.

Chapter 6—Introduction to the matter of the perceptible world.

1–7 The transformation of the elements into one another shows that bodies require a persisting substrate to receive the new form and lose the previous one.

7–14 That bodies are composites of matter and form is shown by considering a thing's destruction and the successive stages of its dissolution.

14–19 The elements too must be composite, consisting of form with respect to their quality and shape and prime matter with respect to their indefinite substrate.

Chapter 7—Survey and criticism of Presocratic and Epicurean theories.

1–2 Empedocles was wrong to treat the elements as matter.

2–13 Anaxagoras mistakenly identified his "mixture" with matter. He also erred in assigning the Forms to matter and having Nous sift them out.

13–20 The proponent of the "boundless" failed to clarify this principle, which could not be matter under any description.

20–28 The Atomists were on quite the wrong track in assigning the role of matter to indivisible bodies, and in omitting the agency of mind and soul, which could not be composed of atoms.

Chapter 8—Basic features of the matter of the perceptible world.

1–14 This kind of matter is incorporeal and therefore has no perceptible properties including magnitude. In its nature it is incomposite, simple, and devoid of everything.

14–30 It derives all of its attributes from the formative principles that give it quality and quantity.

Chapter 9—Perceptible matter's intrinsic lack of magnitude and quantity.

1–12 Quantity itself is not something quantitative; things that *have* quantity are participants in Quantity by means of the formative principle (*logos*). This confers magnitude on things analogously to the way that Whiteness makes things white.

12–13 The formative principle does not "unfold" matter into a magnitude. Rather, it bestows on matter a magnitude that was previously absent.

Chapter 10—Indefiniteness as the way to think of perceptible matter.

1–11 Because matter has no genuine properties, it can only be represented indefinitely and as indefinite.

12–17 The soul becomes assimilated to matter like the eye that tries to see in the dark.

17–25 If we could think of matter by itself, it would be the shapeless residue of an impression abstracted from an object's surface features.

25–35 Thoughts are clear only in respect to form; hence souls confer shape on matter because they cannot bear its indefiniteness.

Chapter 11—Problems and solutions concerning perceptible matter's lack of magnitude.

1–13 How can bodies require a receptacle that has no magnitude? What can such a thing contribute to their composition?

13–27 Perceptible substances have a pre-existing magnitude, but absolute matter cannot already possess volume. It must be, rather, the recipient of extension and volume.

27–43 Because of its receptivity of volume, matter has the illusory look of being volume. It is great-and-small together, indefinite and multiple, intrinsically unstable.

Chapter 12—In spite of its lack of magnitude, perceptible matter is something real and a fundamental contributor to bodies.

1–13 The composite nature of bodies requires the existence of matter as the unitary recipient of their magnitude and forms.

13–20 Actions do not need matter because they are not composites, but matter serves agents as the substrate of their actions, and agents serve actions as matter when agents switch from one action to another.

20–37 The necessity of matter to the physical world establishes its obscure reality as invisible substrate.

Chapter 13—Perceptible matter is neither a positive nor a negative quality.

1–14 As indefinite substrate, matter cannot be a positive quality, but could it be negatively qualified in the sense of being absolute privation?

14–23 No. Matter's lack of positive quality cannot imply that it is qualified even negatively. Moreover, privation is not the attribution of anything but the negation of a form.

23–32 No types of qualification are applicable to matter. Its character is neither what it is nor what it is not, but its absolute indefiniteness as being "other."

Chapter 14—What is the relation of perceptible matter to privation?

1–17 The [Aristotelian] claim that matter and privation are "one in substrate but two in account" raises questions about the separate account pertinent to each of them.

17–24 If privation is a way of signifying something's not-being in the sense of its absence and being other, then there will still be two accounts, one of the privation and the other of matter.

24–30 But if the account of privation reveals matter's indefiniteness, it might touch on matter itself; in which case how could there still be two accounts?

Chapter 15—Both perceptible matter and privation are essentially unlimited.

1–17 Unlimited is not an incidental attribute of matter, but what matter is.

17–28 This essential nature pertains to matter in the intelligible world where it originates from the unlimitedness generated by the One. Unlimitedness here, however, is greater than there because here it is only an image, and therefore less real and less good.

28–38 In contrast with the formative principle, matter is not essential unlimitedness but it is essentially unlimited and opposed to the formative principle.

Chapter 16—As other than definite being, perceptible matter is the unlimited receptacle of limit, and antithetical to everything good including intelligible matter.

1–4 Matter is not a being, but *qua* privation it is something, namely the antithesis of things that have a formative principle.

4–16 As such, matter is not destroyed by the advent of a limit. Its nature as unlimited is actualized and perfected by its function as pure recipient.

16–24 In its function as recipient of form and limit, matter remains intrinsically unlimited. In its complete impoverishment, it is antithetical to everything good.

24–27 Intelligible and perceptible matter are completely opposite. The former is Being, the latter not being.

Translation of Plotinus
Ennead *II.4 [10]*

On Matter

1. In describing so-called "matter" as a sort of "substrate" and "receptacle" of forms, all who have theorized about this kind of nature offer a common account of it, and to that extent they proceed in the same way. But they immediately disagree once they start investigating the further questions as to | what this underlying [substrate] nature is, and how and of what it is receptive.

Those who maintain that bodies are the only beings, and that substance consists in bodies, say that there is only one matter, that it underlies the elements, and that it is itself substance. They also say that all | other things are, as it were, conditions of matter, and that even the elements are "matter in a certain state." Furthermore, they have the effrontery to take matter right up to the gods, and finally

even [to identify] their very own god with this "matter in a certain state." They also assign body to it, calling it inert and unqualified body but also magnitude.

Others say that matter is incorporeal. Some of this
15 group deny that | matter is single. They hold that the matter described by the former people does indeed underlie bodies, but that there is a different and prior matter among the intelligibles, which underlies the Forms there and the incorporeal substances.

2. So our first questions must be about this second matter, whether it exists, what it is like, and how it exists.

(i) If in fact the essence of matter is something indefinite and shapeless, and if nothing indefinite and shapeless exists among the intelligible beings, which are the
5 best things, matter will not be there either. | (ii) Further, if each [intelligible being] is simple, matter will not be needed in order to make it a composite from matter and something else.

(iii) Moreover, things that are coming to be and successively changing need matter—for they are the source of our notion of the matter pertaining to perceptible things—but things that are not coming to be have no such need.

(iv) We can ask, besides, where did intelligible matter come from, and whence did it derive its existence? For, if it came into being, it must have originated by the

agency of something. But if it is everlasting, there will be | more than one principle, and the primary beings [will be primary merely] by chance.

(v) And if form is an adjunct to matter, the ensuing composite will be a body, with the result that body will exist in the intelligible world as well.

3. [In response to 2.i] We must start by saying that we should not in all cases disparage what is indefinite, or even something that is shapeless by its very conception, if it is going to make itself available to the things that precede it, the things that are best. Soul, for example, is naturally disposed like this in relation to Intellect and Reason, since it is shaped by them and brought into a better form.

| [In response to 2.ii] Among the intelligibles compositeness applies differently from the way it applies in bodies; for even formative principles are composite, and by their activity they make a composite being, namely the nature that is engaged in formative activity. And if the focus [of their formative activity] is different from their source, they are even more composite.

[In response to 2.iii]. The matter of things that come to be is always changing its form, but the matter of everlasting things is always the same and has the same form. With the matter here, on the other hand, it is | probably just the reverse; for here matter is everything in turn but only one thing at each particular time. Therefore, nothing persists

[here] because one thing keeps pushing out another. Hence [the matter here] is never the same. But the matter in the intelligible world is all things at once, and so it has nothing to change into; for it has everything already. Therefore the | matter there is never shapeless, nor in fact is it shapeless even here, though each of them is different [in the way it is shaped].

As to whether matter is everlasting [see 2.iv] or came into being, that will be clear when we grasp exactly what it is.

4. [In response to 2.v] Our doctrine that there are Forms has been demonstrated elsewhere, so let it be presupposed for now. If, then, the Forms are multiple, they must possess something in common, and also something specific, by which they differ from one another. This specificity | or distinguishing difference is their particular shape. And where there is a shape, there is also the subject shaped, which is what the difference is about. Therefore, there is also matter that receives the shape and is the permanent substrate.

Furthermore, if there is an intelligible world there, and this world here is an image of that one, and this world is composite and composed of matter, there must be matter there too. | How could you even call it a world without looking to form? And how could you have form without taking something as repository of the form?

To be sure, it [the intelligible world] is wholly and entirely without distinct parts, but it does have parts in a way. And if these parts are severed from one another [as occurs in the perceptible world], the cutting up and the severance are a condition of matter, since it is matter that has been cut up.

| But if it [the intelligible world], though being many, is partless, the many that exist in a unity are in matter as that unity, and they themselves are its shapes. For you should think of this unity as variegated and multi-shaped. Yet in itself, it [the matter] would have been shapeless prior to being variegated. For if you could mentally remove the variegation and the shapes and formative principles and concepts, what is prior to them would | be shapeless and indefinite and none of the things that are actually on it and in it.

5. [Continuing the response to 2.v] And if, because it [intelligible matter] always has these shapes and has them all together, it is objected that both [matter and Forms] are simply one and that it [the postulated substrate] is not matter, then there will not be matter for the bodies here, either. For it [body] is never without a shape, but it is always a complete whole, though a composite one [consisting of form and matter]. And intellect discovers the | duality. For it divides until it arrives at something simple that cannot be decomposed any further. But as long

as possible, it proceeds into the depth [of the composite entity]. The depth of each thing is matter. Therefore, matter is all dark because the formative principle (*logos*) is the light. Intellect too is a formative principle. Therefore, by seeing the formative principle that is on each thing, intellect considers what is below to be dark | because it is beneath the light. It is like the way the eye, whose form is light, when it gazes at the light and at colors, which are lights, states that what lies beneath the colors is dark and material, concealed by the colors.

But there is a difference between the darkness in the beings of the intelligible world and the darkness in things that are perceptible, and a comparable difference in their matter corresponding to the difference | between the form superimposed upon them both. For the divine matter, on receiving that which defines it, has a defined and intelligent life, but perceptible matter, though it becomes something defined, far from being alive or intelligent, is nothing but an embellished corpse. Also the [perceptible] shape is only an image, so that the substrate too is only an image. But in the intelligible world the shape is authentic, so that the | substrate is authentic as well. Therefore, if those [the Stoics] who say that matter is substance were speaking about intelligible matter, we would have to say that they speak correctly. Because the substrate there *is* substance, or rather, when understood together with the [Form] that is on it, and as a whole, it is illuminated substance.

Whether intelligible matter is eternal needs to be investigated in the same way that one asks that question concerning the Forms. For they are | generated entities in the sense that they have a principle from which they originate, but they are ungenerated because they do not have this principle in a temporal sense; they always originate from something else, but not in the sense of always coming to be, like the physical world, but in the sense of always being, like the intelligible world.

In fact, the Otherness there that makes the matter is itself eternal: for this Otherness is the originating principle of matter, along with the primal | Motion. That is why Motion too has been called Otherness because Motion and Otherness sprang forth together. Moreover, both Motion and Otherness, when proceeding from the First, are undefined. They need the First in order to be defined, and they are defined when they turn to it. Originally matter too was undefined as being other and not yet good and | unilluminated by the First. For if the light comes from the First, what receives the light, before receiving it, was always without light. It has light as something other than itself because the light comes to it from something else.

This is more than enough explanation concerning the topic of matter among the intelligibles.

6. About the receptacle of bodies, let our account be as follows. Bodies require some substrate that is different

from themselves. This is shown by the changing of the elements into one another. The destruction of the element subject to change is not complete; for otherwise there will be a | being that has perished into non-being. Nor again has the generated element entered into being from absolute non-being. Instead, there is a change of one form from another form. But [the subject of the change] persists, receiving the form of the generated element and losing the other one.

The same point is evident when we consider the process of destruction generally—its subject is something composite, from which it follows that | individual things are composed of matter and form. Induction also confirms their composite nature, and so too does dissolution. For instance, if a bowl is broken down into gold, and then the gold into liquid, the liquid too, in its passing away, requires something analogous [to receive its residue].

As to the elements, they must be either form or prime matter or a | composite of [prime] matter and form. Now they cannot be [simply] form; for without matter how could they inhere in volume and magnitude? Nor can they be [simply] prime matter because they are subject to destruction. Therefore, they are a composite of [prime] matter and form. They are form in respect to their quality and shape, and [prime] matter in respect to their substrate, which is indefinite because it is not form.

7. Empedocles classifies the elements as matter, but he has their destruction as counter-evidence to his theory.

Anaxagoras, who makes "the mixture" matter, says that it is not a [mere] capacity for everything but has possession of everything in actuality. Thus, he annihilates the Intellect [*nous*] that he introduces, by making it | neither the giver of shape and form, nor even prior to matter, but simultaneous with it. Yet this simultaneity is impossible. For if the mixture participates in Being, Being is prior to mixture. But if both the mixture and that other thing [i.e., Intellect] are this Being, then there will need to be another third [Being] superior to them. If, then, the Demiurge [i.e., Intellect] | is necessarily prior, why must the Forms be minutely distributed in the matter and then Intellect busy itself on endlessly sifting them out, when it was possible, since matter is without quality, for Intellect to extend quality and shape over all matter? Also, it is surely impossible for "everything to be in everything"?

The proponent of "the boundless" [as matter] needs to state what on | earth that is. If by "boundless" he means "impossible to reach the end of," there is clearly no such thing among realities, neither a "boundless in itself," nor "a boundless" in another nature, as the incidental attribute of some body. On the one hand, a "boundless in itself" [is impossible], because even the part of it would have to be boundless. Nor on the other hand [could it exist] as something's incidental attribute, because its subject

would not be intrinsically boundless, and then it would no longer be simple or matter.

| Nor again will atoms hold the rank of matter because there are no such things. Every body, in fact, is divisible at every point. The atomistic hypothesis can also be contested by the fact that bodies are continuous and fluid, and cannot exist as individual things without intellect and soul, which could not be composed of atoms. Moreover, from atoms nothing different | from them in kind could be created since no demiurge will make anything out of matter that is discontinuous. Countless further criticisms of this theory could be and have been stated; so there is no need to waste further time on it.

8. What, then, is it, this unitary matter, that is described as both continuous and without quality? It is evidently not a body if it is really unqualified; otherwise it would have a quality. We maintain that it is the matter of all perceptible things, not matter for some while being form for | others, as clay is matter for the potter but not matter absolutely—speaking of it not like that but as matter in relation to everything, we should not attach to it, as its nature, any of the features that we observe among perceptible things. Accordingly, besides such qualities as colors, heat and | cold, we should not assign it lightness or heaviness, density, rarity or even figure, and therefore not even magnitude. For there is a difference between

being magnitude or being shape and having a magnitude or having a shape. Matter must not be composite but simple and one thing in its own nature; for in this way it is destitute of everything.

| The donor of its shape will give it a shape that is other than matter itself, and likewise a magnitude and everything else, provisioning it, as it were, from the Beings. Otherwise, the donor would be subservient to the magnitude of matter itself and make it not the size that the donor wants but just the size that the matter wants. To suppose that the donor's will keeps pace with the magnitude of matter is pure fantasy. Moreover, if the maker is | prior to the matter, the matter will be just as the maker wants in every way, serviceable for everything and so for magnitude as well. If matter were to have a magnitude, it would also have to have a shape, so that it would be still harder to fashion.

Therefore, the form comes upon matter, bringing everything to it; the form has it all, including magnitude and everything else that accompanies | the formative principle and is caused by it. Therefore, in each of the [natural] kinds their quantity is determined together with the form, one for human being, another for bird in general, and another for a particular type of bird. Is supplying a quantity to non-quantified matter any more surprising than bringing a quality to it? Quality could not be a formative principle

| without that status also pertaining to quantity, which is form, and measure and number.

9. How, then, can anyone accept a particular reality that does not possess a magnitude? In the same way, surely, that one accepts everything else whose identity does not depend on having a quantity. For existing and having a quantity are not the same. There are many other things that are different from what has quantity. To put it generally, every incorporeal | nature must be classified as not having quantity, and that includes matter too. For even Quantity itself does not have quantity; rather, it is the thing that participates in Quantity that has it. This also makes it clear that Quantity is a Form. Similarly, a thing becomes white by the presence of Whiteness. And what creates the white color on a creature, or the other varieties of color too, is not a variegated color—but a variegated formative principle, | if you allow the expression—similarly what makes something "this large" is not itself this large, but as before, "how large something is" is caused by Largeness or the formative principle. Does Largeness, then, approach matter and unfold it into a magnitude? Not at all, for matter was not already coiled up into a tiny space. Rather, [the formative principle] | gave it a magnitude that was previously absent, just as it also gave matter a previously absent quality.

10. How, then, am I to think of matter's absence of magnitude? Well, how are you going to think of an absence of quality? What act of thinking, what mental focus is involved? It must be [a state of] indefiniteness; for if like is thought by like, the indefinite is thought by the indefinite. In that case, then, | there will be a definite account of the indefinite, but the mind's actual focus on it will be indefinite. And if each thing is known by reason and by an act of thinking, and here the account says what it does say about matter, the intended thinking of it will not be a thinking but a sort of non-thinking; or rather the illusory look of matter will be spurious and not genuine, | composed of one feature that is not true combined with another feature that is the [definite] account. And perhaps it is with an eye on this that Plato said that matter is to be grasped by spurious reasoning.

What, then, is the soul's [state of] indefiniteness? Is it complete ignorance, like a mental blank? No, the indefiniteness is capable of being asserted in a way. Just as darkness serves the eye as matter for every unseen | color, so too the soul, when it has removed everything luminous in perceptible things and is no longer able to define the residue, is in a state like seeing in the dark, and becomes somehow assimilated to what it virtually sees.

But does it really see? [Yes, in a way, but] only as if it were seeing shapelessness and colorlessness and what lacks illumination and also lacks magnitude. Otherwise,

the soul would already confer a form on matter. | Is not, then, the soul's experience in this case the same as when it thinks nothing?

No, when it thinks nothing it says nothing, or rather it experiences nothing. But when it thinks matter, it has an experience that is like an impression of something shapeless.

Yet even when the soul thinks things endowed with shape and magnitude, it thinks them as composites [of matter and form]— as things that | have acquired color and other qualities. It thinks the whole, then, including both components. The thinking or perception of the surface features is clear, but in the case of the substrate, the shapeless constituent, it is obscure, because the substrate has no form. Taking a thing as a composite whole, including its surface features, the soul first sifts out and separates the latter, and then, taking what reason leaves over, thinks this residue—an | obscure thing that it thinks obscurely, a dark thing that it thinks darkly, and that it thinks unthinkingly. And since even matter itself does not remain shapeless but has been endowed with shape in the [perceptible] things, the soul also immediately thrusts onto matter the forms of these things, from distress at matter's indefiniteness, as if it were afraid to be | outside of beings and could not bear to linger in non-being.

11. (1) Why does the composition of bodies need anything in addition to magnitude and all qualities?

Well, something [else] is needed to receive them all.

(2) So this is volume, then; and if it is volume, doubtless it [has] magnitude. If it does not [have] magnitude, it will not even have anywhere to receive [bodies]. Also, if it is without magnitude, what could it contribute | [to the physical world], if it makes no contribution either to form or quality or extension or magnitude, the last of which, wherever it is found, seems to come to bodies from matter?

(3) And speaking generally, just as actions, makings, times, and motions are constituents of reality without containing an underlay of matter, | so too even the primary bodies do not necessarily require matter; they can be the individual wholes that they are, and with a greater degree of variety, by deriving their structure [simply] from a mixture of several forms. Hence this lack of magnitude on the part of matter is an empty name.

The first point to make in response is that it is not necessary for the | receptacle of anything to have a volume unless magnitude is already present to it. For the soul too, which receives everything, possesses everything together, whereas if magnitude were one of its attributes it would possess things in their distinct magnitudes. But matter does take what it receives in extension because it is receptive of extension. It is the way animals and plants, as their magnitude increases, experience | qualitative change

corresponding to their quantity, and if the latter diminished, the quality would diminish too. In such instances a pre-existing magnitude is substrate for the shaping agent, but that does not warrant our critic to demand it in the case of matter as such. For in the case of animals and plants the matter is not absolute, but is the matter of the thing in question; absolute matter, on the other hand, must get its magnitude too from | something else. Accordingly, the future receptacle [i.e., absolute matter] of the form must not [already] have a volume, but must acquire it at the same time that it receives the other qualities.

Matter does have the illusory look of volume because its capacity for volume is primary, as it were, but it is a volume that is empty. This is why some people have said that matter is identical to "the void." I say "illusory | look of volume" because of the times when the soul associates with matter. Having nothing, then, to define, it dissipates itself into indefiniteness, unable to circumscribe matter or arrive at a single point; otherwise the soul would succeed in defining matter.

Accordingly, we should describe matter as neither exclusively large nor again as exclusively small, but as "great-and-small." In this sense, then, | it has both volume and yet no magnitude, because it is the matter of volume and, one may say, runs the gamut of volume by contracting from the large to the small and expanding from the small to the great. Its indefiniteness is volume of this kind,

meaning its intrinsic receptivity of magnitude, and it is to be imagined like this. With regard to the other entities that lack magnitude, those of them that are forms are each definite, and so | the idea of volume does not pertain to them at all. But matter, because it is indefinite and intrinsically unstable, is borne hither and thither to every form; and because it is entirely malleable it becomes multiple by its conveyance to everything and becoming everything; and in this way it takes on the nature of volume.

12. Matter, therefore, does contribute hugely to bodies; for the forms of bodies are in magnitudes, and these forms could not come to be connected with magnitude except by getting a connection with what has [already] been given a magnitude [i.e., matter]. For if their [prior] connection had been with magnitude but not with matter, they would lack magnitude and material | foundation alike; in which case they would be only formative principles, whose connection is with soul—and bodies would not exist. Here then [in the physical world] the many forms require a single thing that they are connected with. And this is what has been given a magnitude, but in itself is other than magnitude.

For as we see in daily life, what enables the components of compounds to acquire a unified identity is their having matter. They have no | need of anything else to be connected with because each of the components arrives

bringing its own matter. There is also a need, all the same, for some single thing as their recipient, either a vessel or a place. But place is posterior to matter and to bodies, so that bodies have a prior need of matter.

The fact that actions and makings are without matter is not a reason for withholding matter from bodies. For
15 bodies are composites, whereas | actions are not. As for the agents of actions, at the time of their acting matter provides their substrate by remaining within them, but it does not give itself to their acting, nor is it their objective in acting. One action does not change into another (if that were so, actions would have matter), but agents switch from one action to another, so that they are the
20 matter of their | actions.

Matter, therefore, [then] is necessary both to quality and to magnitude, and therefore to bodies as well. It is not an empty name but something that exists as substrate even though it is invisible and without magnitude. Otherwise, by the same argument, we shall have to deny existence
25 to qualities and | magnitude. For any one of such things could be said to be nothing if taken just on its own. In fact, if these [qualities and magnitude] do exist, though obscurely in each case, there is much more reason for matter to exist even though its existence is not evident and not to be apprehended by the senses, neither by the
30 eyes, since it is colorless, nor by hearing, since it has | no sound. It has no flavors, and so it cannot be sensed by the

nose or the tongue. Can it be apprehended by touch then? No, it cannot, because it is not a body, and body is the object of touch by being dense or rare, soft or hard, moist or dry. None of these is connected with matter. Rather, matter is apprehended by reasoning, yet in an unthinking and empty way; hence the reasoning is "spurious," as we have said.

But isn't even corporeality [then] connected with matter? Well, if | corporeality is a rational principle, it is 35
different from matter, and so matter itself is something else. If, on the other hand, corporeality had already been engaged in manufacture and blended [with matter] in a manner of speaking, matter would quite evidently be body and not simply matter.

13. Suppose that the substrate is some kind of quality, a common one that exists in each of the elements—in that case we need to be told, first, what this quality is. Next, how can a quality be a substrate? And further, how are we to make sense of "qualified" in something size-less [i.e., substrate], | though itself lacking matter and magnitude? 5
And then, if the qualification is determinate, how can it be matter? Yet, if it is something indefinite, it is not a quality but the very substrate and matter we are investigating.

But what stops matter from being unqualified, on the one hand, because by its own nature it does not participate in any of the other qualities, and yet being qualified, on

the other hand, because of this non-participation, | and having the special character of differing from everything else as a kind of privation of them? After all, one who is deprived possesses a quality, a blind person for instance. So if this kind of privation pertains to matter, how is matter not qualified, and qualified all the more if privation pertains to it completely, and if privation itself is a particular qualification?

This claim, however, turns everything into "qualified" things and | "qualities," with the result that even quantity would be a quality, and a substance too. If something is qualified, quality pertains to it, but it is ridiculous to bestow qualification on what is *other* than the qualified, and so is not qualified. If it is qualified because it is *other*, meaning it *is* absolute Otherness, that would not make it qualified because not even Quality is qualified. If, on the other hand, we mean that matter is merely *other*, it is not | other intrinsically but owing to Otherness, [as it is also] the *same* owing to Sameness.

Moreover, privation is not a quality or something qualified, but an absence of quality or of anything else [positive], just as soundlessness is not a quality of sound or of anything else; for privation is a negation, whereas what is qualified consists in an affirmation. Besides, the special character of matter is non-shape, since it consists in not being qualified and in not having | any form. It is absurd, then, to say that matter is qualified because it is

not qualified; that would be like saying that something has a magnitude precisely by not having a magnitude.

Hence matter's special character is nothing *other* than what it is; this character is not an adjunct to matter but consists in matter's relationship to other things, namely its being *other* than them. Other things are not only other, they are each something particular as a form. Yet matter could | appropriately be described as *only other*, 30
or perhaps as "others." In that way, rather than defining it unitarily by using the singular "other," you can indicate its indefiniteness by using the plural "others."

14. But we must now investigate the following question: is matter itself privation or is it what privation is connected with?

The [Aristotelian] theory stating that in substrate both are one, but that in account (*logos*) they are two, has an obligation also to instruct us concerning the account we need to give of each of them—the account of matter that will | define it without attaching any [essential] 5
attribute of privation, and the account of privation that will do likewise [by not mentioning any essential attribute of matter]. Thus, either (i): neither of them is present in the account of the other, or (ii) both of them are present in both accounts, or (iii) only one of them (it makes no difference which) is in the account of the other. If, then, each of the two is separate (i.e., i) and has no need of the

other, the pair of them will be two [separate] things and
10 matter will be | different from privation, even if privation is predicated of it incidentally. In that case the one must not be observed even potentially in the account of the other. If, however, they are related like the snub nose to snubness (i.e., ii), in this case too each of them will be double and a pair of things. But if they are related like fire to heat (i.e., iii), with heat being [essentially] in fire but fire
15 not [essentially] in heat, and if matter is privation | in the [essential] way that fire is hot, privation will be a sort of form of matter, although the substrate will be something else, which must be the matter. So in this way too matter and privation will not be one thing.

Should we, then, interpret "one in substrate but two in account" in the following way—privation does not signify that something is present [in the substrate] but that it is
20 not present, and the privation is a kind of negation of | beings? Just as if someone should say "not being," the negation makes no addition but simply says that something is not; and it would be privation in the sense of "not-being." If, then, privation is "not-being" because it is not "what is," but in being different [from what is] it is [nonetheless] something, there will still be two accounts [as in (i) above]—one account that apprehends the substrate [as receptacle] and the other that shows the relation of privation to other things [as not-being].

Alternatively, the account of matter [as receptacle] shows its relation | to other things, just as the account of the substrate also shows its relation to other things, while the account of privation [its not-being], if it reveals matter's indefiniteness, might actually apply to matter itself [as in (iii) above]. Even so, they will each be one in substrate but two in account. Yet if privation is identical to matter by being indefinite and unlimited and | unqualified, how can there still be two accounts?

15. Our investigation must continue, therefore, into the questions of whether "the unlimited" and "the indefinite" are attributes pertaining to another nature [than matter], and how they are attributes, and whether privation is an attribute.

Now since unlimitedness does not apply to things that involve numbers and formative principles, including boundaries and organizations | and the organization that other things also acquire from these [i.e., numbers and formative principles]— for it is not the fact or process of being organized that organizes them, since the subject of organization is different from the organizing agent, and the organizing agent is limit, boundary, and formative principle—what is organized and bounded is necessarily the unlimited. But matter is a subject of organization, and so is everything besides matter that participates in matter or counts as matter in some sense. | Therefore matter

[itself] *is* necessarily the unlimited; it is not unlimited in the sense that it is so [merely] predicatively and by having "the unlimited" attributed to it.

For in the first place, the attribute of anything must be a formative principle, whereas the unlimited is not a formative principle. Next, to what entity will the unlimited accrue as a mere attribute? It must be to [something that was previously] a limit and something limited. But matter is not | something limited, nor is it a limit. Further, the unlimited will lose its nature if it approaches what is limited. Hence the unlimited is not a [mere] attribute of matter; rather, matter itself *is* the unlimited. For even among the intelligible beings matter is the unlimited; it must have originated there from the unlimitedness of the One, pertaining either to the One's power or its eternity—not that unlimitedness is present in the One, but the One is its maker.

| How is it, then, that matter is found both there and here? It is because even the unlimited is double. What is the difference between them? They differ in the way that an archetype differs from its image. Is the latter, then—the instance here—unlimited to a lesser degree? No, it is more unlimited: for the further an image has escaped from being and truth, the more unlimited it is. In fact, unlimitedness is greater in what is less defined; for the less it is in | the good, the more it is in the bad. So the instance that is there, because it has a greater degree

of reality, is unlimited [only] as an image, whereas the instance that is here, to the extent that it has escaped from being and truth and sunk into the very nature of image, is more truly unlimited.

Are, then, the unlimited [subject] and essential unlimitedness the same? In cases where there is both a formative principle and matter, they are | each distinct, but 30
where there is only matter, we must say either that they are the same, or, preferably, say that in this case essential unlimitedness is absent. For the latter would be a formative principle, and that cannot be present in the unlimited [subject] without negating its being unlimited. In fact, we should describe matter as "unlimited of itself" by its organizational | opposition to the formative principle. For, 35
just as the formative principle is a formative principle and nothing else, so matter, in the organizational opposition of its unlimitedness to the formative principle, must be called unlimited and nothing else.

16. Is matter, then, the same as Otherness? No: it is the portion of Otherness that is organizationally opposed to the things that are Beings strictly, namely the formative principles. And so, though matter is not a being, matter *is something*, and is the same as privation if privation is opposition to the things that exist in determinate form (*logos*).

| Will privation, then, be destroyed by the approach of what it is the privation of? By no means; for the recipient of an acquisition is not itself an acquisition but a privation, and the recipient of a limit is not the thing limited or the limit, but the unlimited in its full extent as such.

In that case, then, how could the approach of a limit not destroy the nature of "the unlimited" itself (i.e., matter), especially since the latter is not unlimited just incidentally?

| Certainly, if it were something [simply] unlimited in quantity, a limit would destroy it. But that is not the case here; [the approach of limit] does the opposite, by preserving it [matter = privation] in existence. For it brings what it is by nature to actuality and perfection, in the way that sowing does to the unsown field, and [conception does] to the female, who, far from losing her femininity when impregnated by the male, becomes still more | feminized. The point is, the thing becomes more what it [already] is.

So must matter be bad by participating in good? No: it is bad because it was [already] in need by its [sheer] lack of possession. What needs one thing but possesses something else could perhaps be intermediate between good and bad if it were somehow balanced between the two; but whatever | has nothing since it is in a state of poverty, or because it *is* poverty, must be bad [by nature]. For this condition is not poverty of wealth, but poverty of thought, poverty of virtue, of beauty, strength, shape,

form, and quality. Surely it is deformed. Surely it is utterly ugly. Surely it is utterly bad.

| The matter of the intelligible world is Being; for what 25
precedes it is beyond Being. Here, however, it is being that precedes matter. Therefore the matter here is not being, being other, beyond the beauty of its being.

Commentary

Chapter 1

Corporeal, incorporeal, and intelligible matter.

Plotinus begins his essay by situating the notion of "matter" in the mainstream tradition of Roman Imperial philosophy. Without naming Platonists, Peripatetics and Stoics, he can expect his readers to identify these as the principal thinkers whose allegedly and roughly similar views he proposes to outline. After offering an omnium gatherum account of the term *hulê* by reference to "substrate" (*hupokeimenon*) and "receptacle" (*hupodochê*) of forms, he indicates that there is substantial disagreement among philosophers about how these notions are construed. Philosophers differ, also, concerning the corporeality or incorporeality of matter, and on whether matter is of one or more than

one kind. Those who make matter corporeal and unitary (who are the Stoics), take all things including even divinity to be a condition of matter. Others (among whom Plotinus tacitly includes Platonists and Peripatetics) agree with the first group in making matter underlie bodies, but they construe matter itself to be incorporeal; and some of this second group posit a further kind of incorporeal matter that underlies incorporeal beings.

1, 1–4 *so-called "matter"*: Plotinus indicates that he is using the term *hulê*, which literally means wood, in the technical ways that he goes on to elucidate. Thus an eighteenth-century scientist might have said "so-called" ether. Plotinus' philosophical users of *hulê* in a technical sense include Platonists, Peripatetics, and Stoics; they exclude Epicureans, who did not make any comparable distinction between form and matter. However, Epicurus himself used *hulê* to refer to the "fuel" that feeds celestial bodies, according to some theories (*Letter to Pythocles* 93, 112), and he also used the term *hupokeimenon* to name the objects that emit the atomic effluences that cause perceptions (*Letter to Herodotus* 50).

"Matter" is a highly misleading translation of *hulê* for much of its usage by Greek philosophers. If we could erase millennia of philosophical history, we should better translate it by such words as foundation or ground (cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 52b1, for the phrase "seat of everything

that comes to be"), and not imply its intrinsic physicality, which is the basic connotation of "matter" in English. Unfortunately, we are stuck with "matter" as the standard translation. Readers, however, need to be reminded that philosophical *hulê* does not presuppose body or materiality, as our ordinary uses of the word matter imply. In his opening words Plotinus presents "substrate" and "receptacle" as virtually a hendiadys, with "forms" pertaining to both terms as what they respectively underlie and receive. This account fully fits the account of matter that he himself will put forward in this essay, but it conflates his predecessors' views rather too neatly and misleadingly. "Substrate" (*hupokeimenon*) is the standard term for matter in Aristotle, Stoicism and the doxographical tradition (see Aetius, Diels, *Dox Gr* 307, on matter as "the substrate of primary coming-to-be and passing away, and other changes"). "Receptacle" is specific to Platonists.

In elucidating matter as a substrate of *forms*, Plotinus has the authority of Aristotle (e.g., *Phys.* 1.9. 192a31–192b1); see Chapter 6 below. Aristotle's "forms," however, are perceptible qualities, unlike Plotinus' immaterial "formative principles" (*logoi*). *Receptacle of all becoming* is Plato's term (*Tim.* 49a6) for the container or "nurse" that is entered into and departed from by the "traces" or "copies" of everlasting Forms. According to this cosmology, the Receptacle and its fleeting contents are the foundation of the physical world. Plotinus draws strongly on this theory,

especially in the later chapters of this essay (see also III.6. 11–13 and 19, where he discusses the *Timaeus* passage in detail). *Hulê* is not a word that Plato uses in describing the Receptacle, but the usage probably goes back to the early Academy, perhaps even to Plato himself (see below p. 174), and thence was inherited by Aristotle: see Fleet (2012) on IV.8.6, 18–28. For a selection of texts on matter in Middle Platonism see Boys-Stones (2018), ch. 4, especially 4B Moderatus (text L, p. 22 above) and 4H Aetius, and also Dillon (1993), *Alcinous*, 89–92.

1, 6–13 Plotinus now outlines and criticizes the Stoics' conception of matter under the description "substrate" (see LS 44D). His report tallies with our other sources for the most part, including the restriction of all beings to bodies, the identity of matter with substance (*ousia*, cf. Chapter 5, 20 below), and its being "inert and unqualified body" (*sôma apoion*). Strictly, however, this last expression, and the identity of matter with substance, apply not to all Stoic uses of *hulê*, which often refers to the two passive elements (earth and water), but to what the school called "prime matter" (see *SVF* 1.86 and LS 44E). The expression prime matter (already used by Aristotle, e.g., *Metaph*. 5.4.1015a7–10 and 9.7.1049a24–27) picks out the Stoics' completely amorphous and "passive" principle of reality, which is everlastingly blended with the "active" principle that they called god (*theos*). God and matter are actually a

coordinate duality of principles in Stoicism, but Plotinus presents Stoic matter here (and elsewhere, VI.1.25) as their *single* primary principle. Stoics did not identify god, as he tendentiously claims, with "matter in a certain state" (though his report to that effect is included in *SVF* 2.320: see LS vol. 2, 45g, and Calcidius 294). Instead, Stoic god is the reason (*logos*) or cause in prime matter, which endows it with qualities.

This subordination of Stoic god to matter was probably something that Plotinus drew from his Platonist sources; see Plutarch, *Moralia* 781E, where Plutarch complains that "it is not reasonable or fitting for god to be located in matter that is completely passive (*panta paschousei*), as some philosophers say." If Plotinus believed that to be the Stoic position, we can better understand his expostulation about Stoic "effrontery." We should not weaken his complaint by emending the text I have translated by "their very own (*autôn*) god," to the rare and poetic verb *autein*, accepted by Gerson (2018) and translated there by "proclaim"; see Armstrong's dissenting note, 107n2. It suits Plotinus' polemical purpose to promote the Stoic notion of matter ahead of god, thus reversing his own notion of divinity's precedence (similarly IV.7.4, 17 and VI.1.26, 12). For texts and discussion of the Stoic sources see LS Chapters 27, 28, 44 and 45.

Plotinus subsequently indicates (Chapter 5, 20) that he would approve the Stoics' equation of matter with

"substance" (*ousia*) if they had intended *ousia* to refer to the matter of his own intelligible world. What he chiefly and vehemently objects to is the corporeality of Stoic matter. (See IV.7.4 for his early argument against the corporeality of the Stoic notion of soul.) At VI.1.26, 20ff. he complains that the Stoics' notion of bodily matter as a three-dimensionally extended solid (see LS 45E for this definition of body) contradicts its supposedly amorphous nature by attributing some quality to it. His efforts to absolutely separate the concepts of body and matter will prove to be one of the most tortuous and taxing parts of the present essay (see Chapter 12). In other respects, however, Plotinus was heavily indebted to the Stoic concept of prime matter, especially for its attributes of being completely passive, devoid of all intrinsic shape and quality, and unceasingly subject to change.

1, 13 *inert and unqualified*: This translation renders the single word *apoion*. Early Stoic philosophers coined the term (see *SVF* 1. 85, 493) to express not only prime matter's "unqualified" nature but also its being the "inert" and antithetical counterpart to their "active" principle (*to poioun*, see text H, p. 21 above). Plotinus regularly describes matter with this term, e.g. IV.7.3, 8 and VI.9.7, 12. At I.8.10, 1, he explains that *apoios* is applied to it "because matter has in its own right none of the qualities which it is going to receive and which are going to be in

it as substrate, but not in the sense that it has no nature at all" (trans. Armstrong).

1, 14–18 Having described the Stoic theory of corporeal matter, Plotinus turns to the alternative thesis that matter is incorporeal. Commentators regularly interpret him to be alluding to Platonists and Peripatetics. Plotinus very likely takes himself to be doing so, but it is actually he himself who most explicitly and adamantly insists on matter's incorporeality (see Chapter 8 below, and III.6.7); hence he implicitly includes himself in this group of "incorporeal" matter theorists. The Middle Platonist tradition is probably best reported by Alcinous 8.3 (Boys-Stones 4E, cf. Calcidius 320), who describes matter as "neither body nor incorporeal, but potential body," with the latter expression derived from Aristotle (*GC* 2.1. 329a32–33), to whose account Plotinus will give special attention in Chapter 6 below. Unlike Plotinus, Aristotle regarded the proximate matter of ordinary objects as itself bodily (e.g., the wood of the bed). Here, however, Plotinus seems to allude to Aristotle and Peripatetics as theorists of "prime" matter (see texts C and D, p. 19 above) understood in Plotinus' own way as the universal and totally amorphous substrate of all perceptible things.

It is misleading of Plotinus to say, as he does in line 15, that the "incorporeal" theorists hold "that the matter described by the former people [i.e., Stoics] does indeed

underlie bodies." That matter is itself a body. What he should have said is that the incorporeal theorists and Stoics agree in positing an amorphous matter as the substrate of *determinate* bodies.

1, 17 Who are those who "say that there is a different and prior matter among the intelligibles"? The principal user of this notion in extant texts is actually Plotinus himself in the present essay! Given the rarity of the expression among other Platonists, he may even have been the first philosopher in the tradition to have postulated "intelligible matter" as such, borrowing a phrase from Aristotle (see *Metaph*. 7.10.1036a9–11 where the phrase refers to the pure extension of geometrical figures, and 8.6.1045a34 where it signifies the generic element in a definition). The familiar Platonic expression for what he seems to envision is Indefinite Dyad, which Pythagoreans and early Platonists named as "material" correlative to the One (see V.4.2, 7, DL 8.25, and Kalligas, 306, who aptly describes the Dyad as "something like a shapeless intelligible substrate that, by the action of the One, is configured into an intelligible cosmos"). At V.1.5, 14 Plotinus refers to the Dyad "in the intelligible world as a sort of substrate." This passage harks back to Aristotle's programmatic statement that for Plato the Dyad is the *underlying matter* or the principle called "great and small" (*Metaph.* 1.6, 988a8–14, text B, p. 19

above), an expression that Plotinus himself will quote in Chapter 11 in reference to perceptible matter.

It is striking, however, that Plotinus does not use the term Dyad in elucidating intelligible matter in this essay, which is his fullest account of the concept, nor does he refer to it in his brief allusion to intelligible matter in II.5.3 (see below). I suspect that his reticence is due to the dualistic and negative associations that the term *duas* had acquired in such earlier Platonists as Numenius, see Dillon (1977), 373–374. Hence I doubt whether Arruzza (2015), 111, is right to say that "the notion of intelligible matter had been particularly elaborated within the Middle Platonic tradition," citing Numenius fr. 11. What Numenius refers to there is "dyadic matter" which, unlike Plotinus' intelligible matter, neither originates from the One nor acquires identity with Intellect. Moreover Calcidius 320, who copiously draws on Numenius, completely rejects intelligible matter.

Plotinus uses the exact Aristotelian phrase *hulê noêtê* only once, in III.5.6, 44. There it refers not to the intelligible world as such but to the make-up of spirits (*daimones*). "Intelligible matter" is acceptable English for the "different and prior matter" Plotinus now proceeds to elucidate (cf. V.1.3, 23, on the beauty of "Intellect's matter"), and I will use it here for convenience. However, it is also a potentially misleading expression. What makes this matter different and prior to the matter underlying

bodies is not its having intelligibility as its own distinctive feature (for it is not intelligible as such, unlike Aristotle's "intelligible matter") but its being the *foundation* of the Platonists' intelligible Forms.

Plotinus refers again to the "proponents of matter in the intelligible world" in II.5.3, and there too he does not identify them. This is the short essay on potentiality and actuality appended to II.4 but probably composed years later; see Arruzza (2015). As in II.4 he draws heavily on Aristotle, both positively and negatively, but chiefly to establish potentiality as the permanent and equivocal status of prime matter in its application to perceptible beings. His comments on intelligible matter there (II.5.3, 8–13) are perfunctory in contrast with the four chapters he devotes to the notion here. According to the doctrine of II.5 there is no potentiality in the intelligible world, and therefore no matter there except as an inseparable, though mentally detachable, aspect of form. See Kalligas, 333, who comments that "P. seems to be distancing himself here from the proponents of intelligible matter," to which I would add the cautionary statement in VI.3.5, 7.

Chapter 2

Problems concerning intelligible matter.

In the previous chapter Plotinus implies that he endorses "substrate and receptacle of forms" as acceptable formulations for the notion of matter in general. Setting aside disagreements about the interpretation of these terms in their application to the bodies of the perceptible world, he now turns to the final issue that he raised there—the nature of the matter underlying the Forms of the intelligible world. He devotes the present chapter to mooting five systematic challenges to this notion. He responds to these challenges in Chapters 3–5.

2, 1–2 *whether it exists, what it is like, and how*: The second and third questions recall the language of Chapter 1, 4–5, concerning the general notion of matter, but the first question here is new. It is called for because intelligible matter, unlike generic and perceptible matter, cannot be assumed to exist without argument. Rather than now responding to the three questions, Plotinus postpones his answers, letting them emerge as he takes up each of the five challenges.

Plotinus is not addressing other philosophers here, as he does in Chapter 1, but fellow Platonists, presumably ones who may have strong objections to the very notion

of intelligible matter. The phrasing of the challenges and responses presupposes absolute commitment to Platonic metaphysics.

2, 2–3 *Indefinite and shapeless*: Aristotle had established these terms as standard attributes of matter: see *Phys.* 1.7.191a10; *Cael.* 3.8.30617 (referring to Plato, *Tim.* 51a); and especially *Metaph.* 1.8.989b18, for matter's being indefinite before it is shaped by form. Aristotle's context there includes the Platonic principle of Otherness as opposed to Unity. These notions will occur repeatedly in what follows.

2, 9 *More than one principle, and the primary beings [will be primary merely] by chance*: This truncated sentence formulates the unpalatable implications of the dilemma's second horn—"if intelligible matter were everlasting, as distinct from being generated." In that case, (i) matter would share the One's status of being a principle (i.e., an absolute and underived entity), and (ii) the combined primacy of One and matter, as principles, would be fortuitous, and not a necessary function of their ontology. At V.1.9.23–4 Plotinus argues similarly that a plurality of principles would render their status as *archai* fortuitous (*kata suntuchian*). Noble (2018), 71n50, interprets "the primary beings" (*ta prôta*) as a reference to the Forms. While that is often what Plotinus means with

this expression, it would be quite out of place here. In this context we should interpret "primary beings" (*plural*) as the implication of giving matter the counterfactual status of a primary principle alongside the One. In II.4.5, 32–35, where Plotinus answers this challenge, he tellingly alludes to the One by calling it "the first" (*singular*).

2, 10–11 *If form is an adjunct to matter*: The way Plotinus formulates this premise puts the reader in mind of the way Aristotle expresses the accretion of nutriment to a body (cf. *GC* 1.5.321a22, using the same verb as Plotinus here, *proserchomai*). Thus, Plotinus reinforces the challenge of a role for matter in the world of incorporeal beings. At the end of this essay, using the same verb, he forthrightly rejects Aristotle's notion that perceptible matter can ever become qualified by any adjunct.

Lines 2–12 In sum, the five challenges and ensuing responses concerning intelligible matter concern (1) indefiniteness and shapelessness (lines 2–4; Chapter 3, 1–5); (2) compositeness (lines 5–6; Chapter 3, 5–9); (3) change and changelessness (lines 6–8; Chapter 3, 9–17); (4) origin, status, and eternity (lines 8–10; Chapter 5, 26–39); and (5) relevance to incorporeal forms (lines 10–12; Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, line 23). These are powerful and apposite challenges; for if they cannot be answered in

ways that are consistent with Platonism, they completely undermine the postulate of intelligible matter.

In Gerson's translation Chapter 2 is divided into three paragraphs only, treating point (2) together with (3), and point (4) together with point (5). I follow Kalligas, 309–311, in treating all five points as independent challenges.

Chapter 3

Resolution of problems concerning intelligible matter.

3, 1–5 This first challenge gives Plotinus an opportunity to begin presenting his own ideas about intelligible matter. We may think of his imagined interlocutor as a Platonist who throws back at him a familiar version of Platonism in which the excellent reality of definite, unitary, and changeless Forms is sharply pitted against the unstable multiplicity of imperfect phenomena. What role could there be for shapeless and indefinite matter in a Platonist's intelligible world?

Plotinus could have answered that question by trotting out the doctrine concerning the Indefinite Dyad's emergence from the One. Instead of mentioning these difficult concepts at this stage, he appeals to the more tractable notion of the rational soul's dependence for its mental content and form on the metaphysically prior entities Intellect (*nous*) and Reason (*logos*). Treating matter as a scalar or relative notion, as Aristotle had frequently done, Plotinus indicates that soul (an intelligible entity) is matter, or something shapeless and indefinite, relative to intellect (cf. II.5.3, 13–14, III.9.5, 1–3, V.1.3, 23) from which it derives its shape. Aristotle had famously characterized passive nous as *matter* for the active intellect, which actualizes its potentiality and receptivity, and as "the

place of forms" (*De an.* 3.4–5). Plotinus here and elsewhere incorporates these ideas into his version of Platonism.

3, 5–9 The second challenge to intelligible matter—*If each [intelligible being] is simple* (Chapter 2, line 5)—looks highly effective because Platonic Forms had traditionally been represented as incomposite and indivisible into parts (cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 78c). Plotinus skillfully shifts the term "composite" away from its physicalist Aristotelian connotations (i.e., matter that combines with form to constitute bodily substances) to "conceptually complex." Forms are incomposite in their make-up, but they are not "simple" unities. In V.9.3 (seemingly written shortly before our essay), Plotinus had argued that the soul (like "everything said to be," line 9) is a composite being in its dual aspects as both recipient of formative principles (*logoi*) from Intellect (cf. III.2.2, 16–18 on the outflow of *logos* from *nous*) and as active transmitter of these principles, to generate the elements and contents of the physical world.

3, 7–8 *by their activity they make a composite being, namely the nature that is engaged in formative activity*: In this difficult Greek I take Plotinus to invoke his doctrine concerning the trickle-down effects that Intellect's *logoi* have on soul, and then in turn on nature. The "activity" (*energeia)* of the *logoi* has a reciprocal effect on nature (*physis*), causing it in its turn to be formatively active

(*energousan eis eidos*), meaning the nature that generates the constituents of the perceptible world. For comparison, I cite two translations of this phrase, which leave its meaning less explicit: "by their actuality they make composite the nature which is active towards the production of form" (Armstrong), and "by their activity they make composite the nature that is directing its activity to form" (Gerson). In II.3.17, 3–5 (seemingly written at the end of his life but placed by Porphyry just before II.4) Plotinus describes this *logos* as "neither a thinking nor a seeing, but a power in the generative soul that manipulates matter, without knowing but only doing, like an impression or figure in water." On his notion that perceptible matter is timelessly generated by soul, see O'Brien (1991), 15–25.

3, 8–9 *And if the focus [of their formative activity] is different from their source, they are even more composite*: The main question in translating this exceptionally cryptic sentence is the unexpressed subject of the unexpressed verb. Literally this sentence says: "And if [it is] both toward one thing and from a different thing, [it is] even more [composite]." I bracket "it is" and "composite" because these words are not in the Greek. Armstrong and Gerson take "it" to be "nature," but I prefer to let "it" refer to the formative activity of both nature and *logoi*. What gives "composite" its purchase in the intelligible world is the Janus face of all beings there, i.e., their "looking toward"

their respective products on the one hand (soul or nature or the perceptible world), and on the other hand their "looking back" to their source in the hierarchy of intelligible beings and ultimately the One. Intelligible beings, we could say, are "composite" because they are not self-contained.

3, 9–17 The concept of matter meaning substrate had been introduced into philosophy, as Plotinus says in Chapter 2 lines 7–8, in order to account for the underlying identity of perceptible objects through changes of quality and quantity. Since the everlasting items of the intelligible world are not subject to change, they appear to have no need of matter. To deal with this third and very powerful challenge, Plotinus cannot assign the attributes of perceptible matter to its intelligible counterpart, as he does in his responses to the two previous challenges. The world of Platonic Forms does not admit of change in any sense.

Rather than fudge the issue of a *substrate for change*, Plotinus hints at the Receptacle account of matter, the relevance of which to Platonic Forms he will fully expound in Chapter 4. Intelligible beings do not need matter "to change into," but they need it, or rather require it, as the recipient of all the forms that they have "always" and "all at once" (see Perdikouri, 103). Here the common attribute of the two kinds of matter is their having "everything," perceptible matter having it successively, one quality or shape

at a time, intelligible matter having everything "at once" and "already": see V.3.15, 20–26 for the notions of Intellect as "one-everywhere," "all-together," and "one-everything."

That Plotinus has his mind on Plato's Receptacle notion of matter here is shown by III.3.6.11, 12. There, after a quotation of *Timaeus* 50c4–5 he echoes the language of our passage concerning the way things push out one another (line 12) in perceptible matter, with reference to the Form copies that flit in and out of the receptacle.

3, 15–17 Plotinus explains the different ways each kind of matter "is shaped" in the next two chapters. He takes up the fourth challenge concerning intelligible matter's origin and eternity at the end of Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Positive arguments concerning the existence and nature of intelligible matter.

Here and in the first half of the following chapter Plotinus gives his response to the fifth challenge to the existence of incorporeal matter that he adumbrated in Chapter 2. He has already defended the appropriateness of compositeness to incorporeal beings (Chapter 2, 5–9, Chapter 3, 5–8), but that defense did not face the most obvious objection that compositeness imports corporeality to the intelligible world, as when we think of a form, such as a sculpted head, accruing to a piece of bronze. Accordingly, Plotinus now sets out to show systematically how the matter/form conjunction can be, or rather must be, apposite to the intelligible world without introducing the compositeness associated with perceptible bodies. The three arguments that he advances in this chapter boil down to the single claim that matter is as essential to forms in the intelligible world as it is to the forms of perceptible things.

4, 1–2 It is fairly unusual for Plotinus to mention other works by himself (but cf. I.8.15, 3; III.4.14, 14; and V.1.1, 27). Most likely he refers here to the earlier essay V.9, where in Chapters 3–8, drawing on the soul's ascent to Beauty in Plato's *Symposium,* he argues for the existence of the

separate intelligible world of Forms, wherein Intellect constitutes all Forms into an "intelligible universe" (*kosmos noêtos*).

4, 2–7 His claim that the multiplicity of the Forms implies their having matter as a "common" (i.e., shared) recipient of their specific shapes strongly recalls Aristotle's account of the genus as substrate or matter to which the differentia and quality belong (*Metaph.* 4.28.1024b6–9); cf. Cherniss (1944), 101–104, on Aristotle's treatment of the Forms' need for a material substrate. The claim also fits the Aristotelian notion of intelligible matter as the extension necessary to the existence of a plurality of intelligible things (*Metaph.* 7.10.1036a12). However, in VI.3.2, 10–14 Plotinus argues that matter cannot be a genus because it has no differentia, meaning that it is not the class of any set of specific things. More generally, this argument might be read as an effective challenge to the self-predication and self-sufficiency thought to be characteristic of Plato's Forms in his earlier dialogues. Rather than supposing that forms or qualities can be free-floating, as it were (with Beauty, for instance, beautifying itself, or Largeness being large), it is far more plausible to think that Forms always presuppose a correlative subject, which it is their function to inform and qualify—what Plotinus calls their common substrate.

Forms on this view are not viable entities as purely potential or contingent qualities. If Beauty exists, there must always *be* something (some matter) that is made beautiful by its presence: thus "you cannot have form without taking something as repository of the form."

4, 7–11 The metaphysical tie between form and matter pertains to the perceptible world. Therefore it applies *a fortiori* to "the intelligible cosmos," which is the perceptible world's paradigm and archetype, with the duality of form and matter there constituting a fully actual and unitary nature (II.5.3, 17).

4, 11–17 This is the chapter's third argument for the inseparability of form and matter in the intelligible world. In the first argument Plotinus justifies the need for matter as the multiple Forms' common and unifying principle. Yet the matter of perceptible beings is always a threat to their unity and persistence, making them liable to fragmentation. How is that avoidable for the Forms of the intelligible world in their relation to matter? Plotinus solves this problem, in characteristically polysemous style, by granting that the intelligible world is "wholly and entirely without distinct parts, and [. . .] indivisible, but it does have parts *in a way*"; cf. VI.9.5, 15 for Intellect as an intelligible cosmos that has "all things in itself and is all things, a multiplicity that is undivided and yet again

divided." Thus, though the intelligible world is wonderfully "variegated and multiform" (cf. VI.2.2, 3), its multiplicity and variety need containment "*in* a unity," namely in this special kind of matter. And thanks to that unity, in spite of the multiplicity of its Forms, the intelligible world is not susceptible to the fragmentation of perceptible matter. Plotinus could also have insisted, as he does later in II.5.3, 11, that intelligible matter, unlike the matter of perceptible beings, does not import potentiality and therefore instability and change.

4, 17–20 Matter underwrites the unity of the Forms it receives because it is metaphysically prior to them—see Rist (1962). To discern matter's intelligible function, which it owes to the One as its source, we need to remove from it "variegation, shapes, formative principles, and concepts." Like Plato's Receptacle with no intrinsic properties, intelligible matter serves as container of all the Forms or thoughts that Intellect, which is its active partner, imparts to it as intelligible substances.

4, 17 *prior to being variegated*: Plotinus dwells on the "priority" (Greek *pro*) of intelligible matter to all shape and definition, and he will recur to it at the end of the next chapter. This priority is completely atemporal because the intelligible substrate is never actually shapeless, and cannot be properly conceived as being such. Hence, I use

the subjunctive in translating the implied verbs in these counterfactual sentences: "would have been shapeless" and "would be shapeless." Plotinus uses "prior" to express the doctrine that Intellect, in its primary but timeless emanation from the One, is intrinsically amorphous, requiring reversion to the One in order to instantiate the actual Forms of thought. The matter of the physical world, however, is always and inherently shapeless, as we shall learn at the end of the essay.

Chapter 5

Similarity and difference between intelligible and perceptible matter.

In this lengthy chapter Plotinus concludes his response to the fifth challenge concerning the relation of form to intelligible matter (see Chapter 2, 10–12), and then gives his response to the fourth challenge about its origin and status (Chapter 2, 8–10). Though sometimes compressed (note the parentheses in the translation), the Greek is generally more limpid than in the earlier chapters, and quite poetic in the imagery of darkness and light. In the later lines Plotinus for the first time invokes his heavy metaphysical baggage of procession from the One (which he calls the First) and reversion to that principle.

5, 3–4 *It [body] is never without a shape*: The implied subject must be body, as MacKenna and Perdikouri also read the Greek, and not matter, as Armstrong and Gerson propose. Matter is the demonstrandum of the argument. A perceptible body always has a shape or form, making it "a complete whole," but it is nonetheless a composite entity, and hence requires matter. By analogy and owing to the affinity between the two worlds (Chapter 4, 8), the everlasting unity and completeness of the intelligible world (also posited there, lines 12–16) does not eliminate the

conceptual and metaphysical difference between form and matter. They constitute together a composite world, and therefore, besides form, there is need for matter in the intelligible world.

5, 5 *duality*: I take *to ditton* to refer to the duality of matter and form, cf. "double" (*diploun*) in the similar context at II.5.3, 17. The remark in Gerson, 169n19, saying it is "the duality of the Indefinite Dyad and of its imitations," does not fit the argument.

5, 6–15 The analytical process envisioned here—decomposing the composite object down to its dark and impenetrable depth—seems apposite to the discovery of the matter of perceptible objects. It is much harder to see how one might arrive at intelligible matter by such a process. Although Plotinus intends "darkness" to pertain initially to both kinds of matter, he soon differentiates between them, treating the application of darkness to intelligible matter as only a preliminary condition. He regularly associates darkness with indefiniteness and non-intelligibility (see III.9.3, 13, and VI.1.27, 3), and illumination with the converse (see Schroeder in Gerson 1996, 341–343), echoing Aristotle's famous association between light and the active intellect, *De anima* III.5. Plotinus probably didn't invent the image of seeing in the dark because it is elaborately applied to the quasi-discernment of matter by Calcidius

344. In V.1.2, 25–26, perhaps written immediately before the present essay, he describes the universe "prior to soul" as "a dead body, earth and water, or rather the darkness of matter, non-being."

5, 15–23 The two kinds of matter are alike in being receptive of shape, but life, intelligence, and authenticity pertain only to "divine" matter, whereas the matter of perceptibles is an "embellished corpse," befitting its status as the substrate of mere "phantoms" (copies of Forms). These startling words are the first indication in the essay of the negativity that will become increasingly marked once Plotinus moves entirely into the matter of the perceptible world in his later chapters. By contrast, intelligible matter, thanks to its union with form or intellect, qualifies as "an illuminated *substance*" (even called "beautiful" at V.1.3, 23). The Stoics, to whom Plotinus wryly alludes again (cf. Chapter 1, 6–14) at line 20, would have been justified in calling their matter substance if they were talking about his intelligible matter and not about an amorphous body.

5, 24–39 Here Plotinus responds to the fourth challenge of Chapter 2 concerning (1) the origin of intelligible matter and (2) whether its status as a putative eternal principle compromises the unconditional priority of "what comes first."

As regards (1), as he has already been showing, Forms and intelligible matter are coordinate beings. While neither of them has an origin in time, they are both causally dependent on "something else" for their status as everlasting entities. In the latter sense they have an originating principle, though they are not subject to the everlasting *becoming* of the physical world.

As regards (2) Plotinus, for the first time in the essay, alludes (quite obscurely, it must be said) to the origin of the second hypostasis, viewing it seemingly in its perspective as Indefinite Dyad: cf.V.1.5, 14–18: "The Dyad is indefinite when taken as identical with what we might call Intellect's substrate. . . Intellect has been shaped, as it were, by the Forms which have arisen in it; but it is shaped in one way by the One, and in another by itself" (transl. Atkinson [1985, lviii]). Rather than mentioning the Dyad in the present essay, Plotinus alludes to it by specifying Otherness (*heterotês*), one of Plato's so-called "five greatest kinds," as the "originating principle" of intelligible matter, and then tagging on "primal Motion." (See Plato, *Sophist* 256c5–e3 and VI.2.8, 35–43.) Otherness and Motion "make" matter, not in the sense that they create it, but rather that they constitute its primal nature as unstable and indeterminate, before it is defined by Intellect.

Plato had posited the five genera, which also comprise Being, Sameness, and Rest, in order to comprehend the basic categories of thought. Otherness and Motion

recall basic features of the *Timaeus*'s Receptacle, which is Plotinus' primary model for matter in Chapters 8–12. In opting for the two genera as precursors of intelligible matter, Plotinus was influenced not only by Plato but also by their Pythagorean associations with indefiniteness (cf. Aristotle, *Phys*. 3.2.201b19–25), which confirms the unstated presence of the Dyad here. He pairs Motion and Otherness to describe the way Intellect moves in distinguishing one thing from another (VI.3.18, 13–15).

In the eloquent first sentence of *Ennead* V.1 (probably written at much the same time as II.4), Plotinus includes "Primary Otherness" as one of the factors, along with audacious self-will, that caused souls to forget their divine home. In that ominous context he associates Otherness with badness (*to kakon*), as he will do again in Chapter 16. Here, at the end of his main treatment of intelligible matter, the issue of value resurfaces when he describes matter, in its association with unilluminated Motion and Otherness, as "not yet good." Like so much of his account, "not yet" is a perspectival, not a temporal, assessment of matter. At the center of this chapter intelligible matter has been accorded illumination and divinity, befitting its status as the foundation of Intellect and the common substrate of its Forms. Yet, to serve accordingly, this matter needs "ancestry" from Otherness to accommodate its conceptual difference from the First, and also from Motion

to explain Intellect's ability to project its thoughts into the formative principles of Soul.

Intelligible matter, then, is not a principle that compromises the unconditional priority of "what come first" (Chapter 2, 10). The two genera are "originating principles" only relatively because they require the First (i.e., One) in order to be defined as the distinct genera that they are. Rather than an ultimate plurality of principles, as the fourth challenge had mooted in the postulate of intelligible matter, the absolute primacy of the One is unsullied by matter's emergence. Thus Plotinus agrees with the earlier Platonist, Moderatus, who "held matter to be derivative from the One (at every level)"; see Dillon (1988), 123n37.

5, 37–39 Plotinus acknowledges, as some of his readers may agree, that he has said more than enough about intelligible matter. In fact he will recur to it in Chapter 15, where he compares its "unlimitedness" with the matter of the physical world, and also in Chapter 16 where he contrasts the two matters in terms of their "being." We should also note, in concluding the commentary on intelligible matter, that Plotinus does not at any point broach the challenge later mooted and dismissed in *Ennead* II.5.3, 4–8 concerning matter's inherent *potentiality* and unsuitability to the intelligible world. The Aristotelian concept of contrariety is strikingly absent from II.4, as I will discuss in the commentary on Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Introduction to the matter of the perceptible world.

Here and in the following chapter Plotinus prepares the ground for his own account of perceptible matter, which will occupy him from Chapter 8 onwards. He starts with an argument that draws closely but selectively on Aristotle's thought and language. He cites sentences almost verbatim from Aristotle's *Physics* on the substrate of changing substances, but entirely omits Aristotle's analysis of the *contrariety* of the attributes that they lose and gain in the process of non-essential change. (This topic will become a major focus of discussion in Chapters 15 and 16 where Plotinus takes issue with Aristotle's notion of "privation" as the *contingent* feature of a substrate that can be receptive to contrary forms; see Cherniss [1944], 172.) As a result of this crucial omission and other differences, it is not quite right to say with Armstrong that Plotinus here gives "an accurate exposition of Aristotle's doctrine of matter," or with Kalligas that he gives "a brief review of the Aristotelian arguments on the necessity of its [matter's] existence." See Perdikouri, 132–133, on Plotinus' further differences from Aristotle, and Cherniss, *loc. cit.*

6, 1 *receptacle* (*hupodochê*) recalls the first sentence of the essay, but now Plotinus appends to it "bodies" instead

of "forms" (alluding to Plato, *Tim.* 50b). He thus marks his transition from the "intelligible matter" of Chapters 2–5 to the physical world, for which Plato had introduced the Receptacle as that "in which" things continuously and always come to be and cease to be.

6, 2–7 Aristotle made his principal and probably earliest exposition of "substrate" (*hupokeimenon*) in *Physics* 1.7–9 for his analysis of perceptual change. Here Plotinus virtually quotes 190a14–15, 191a16–17, and 191b13–14, but he completely omits Aristotle's focus on contrariety in these lines and repeatedly elsewhere, e.g., *Metaph.* 12.2.1069b3–9. However, it is Plotinus, not Aristotle, who characterizes the changing items as "bodies" and "elements." For these words he draws on Aristotle's probably later work, *On Coming-to-be and Passing Away* (especially *GC* 2.1 and 2.5). There Aristotle discusses the compositeness of "perceptible bodies" that undergo "natural" change, and also explains the need for a persisting substrate undergirding the mutual interchange of elements.

Plotinus' elements are the hoary quartet, earth, air, fire, and water, first canonized as the "roots" of all things by Empedocles, with whom he will start the next chapter. He calls the elements more "matterish" (*hulikôtera*) than the "organic" bodies of plants and animals" (VI.3.9, 4). Body ("corporeal substance"), as distinct from the "true substance" (*ousia*) of intelligible Forms, constitutes the

realm of "becoming" (*genesis*), the hallmark of every Platonist. For Plotinus' analysis of bodies and elements, see VI.3.2–9, and the studies by Wagner (1996) and Wilberding (2006).

He begins II.1 by referring, as he does here, to the constant interchange of the elements into one another. Each element has its own nature as a composite of form and amorphous matter (see also V.9.3, 20). Although Plotinus is quite reticent in the present essay about Aristotle's contraries as the qualitative forms of perceptual bodies, he acknowledges elsewhere that only things to which opposition (*enantios*) pertains can act upon one another (cf. III.6.8, 1–8 and ibid. 9.33–35) and that the elements fire and water are contraries (I.8.6, 49–50).

6, 7 *There is a change of one form from another form.* This translation follows MacKenna ("a new form takes the place of an old") and Gerson ("there is a transformation of one form from another"), not Armstrong, who writes "there is a change from one form *into* [my italics] another." As derivatives of intelligible beings, Plotinus' perceptible forms do not change into one another. Rather, one such form replaces or succeeds another, leaving matter, or the substrate, as the subject of the change.

6, 7–13 Plotinus recalls his argument from Chapters 2–4 that connects matter as substrate with form and

compositeness, but focuses here on its most obvious application to bodies, things compounded out of the four elements (V.1.2, 48). In choosing gold as substrate of the broken bowl, he alludes to both Aristotle, *Phys.* 1.7. 190b25, and to Plato's Receptacle (*Tim.* 50a–b). He also has Plato's authority (ibid. 59b1–4) for the dissolution of gold into liquid (also at II.1.6, 51). The unspecified terminus of the corporeal matter's progressive dissolution, from bowl to shapeless gold to liquefaction, must be the prime matter that he names as such in line 14. His reference to "induction" (elsewhere only in I.8.6, 30) recalls his earlier observation that our notion of corporeal matter comes from experience of perceptible changes. "Something analogous" at line 13, for the further stage(s) of gold's dissolution after "liquefaction," recalls Aristotle's postulate that it is by "analogy" that we identify the "underlying nature" of anything (e.g., the "wood" of the bed, *Phys*. 1.7.191a9).

6, 14–19 Returning to the topic of elements, Plotinus alludes for the first and only time in the *Enneads* to "prime matter." Aristotle occasionally uses the phrase *prôtê hulê* for an ultimate substrate (see Introduction and above, p. 82), but it was probably not he himself but his commentators and the later Peripatetics who turned it into the name for an everlasting indeterminate matter (as distinct from an abstract concept), which persists

through the transformations of the elements or primary bodies into one another. The Stoics used the same phrase, no doubt getting it from Aristotle, for their passive and completely amorphous principle (see above, p. 82). These two traditions provide the genealogy of what Plotinus has in mind here—something that is the complete antithesis of "form," in being absolutely "indefinite," as he will elaborate in the later chapters. This characterization of "prime" matter sets the stage for the negativity that he will ascribe to physical matter in what follows.

He arrives at prime matter here by a complex disjunctive argument that runs as follows.

"A" The elements are either (i) form, or (ii) prime matter, or (iii) composites of matter and form.

"B" They cannot be (i) form, because they require matter.

"C" They cannot be (ii) prime matter, because, as shown above, they are perishable.

"D" therefore they are (iii) composites of matter and form.

The argument presumes, like Aristotle (*Metaph.* 7.3.1029a), that composites of matter and form are "posterior" to form or matter simpliciter, neither of which is reducible to the other. Matter must therefore be completely amorphous and indefinite, otherwise it would be composite and thus include form.

However, between form and prime matter, there is a third option, namely "proximate" matter, which is only "indefinite" relative to its function as substrate to something with more specific form, like the wood of the bed. Plotinus does not use this expression, but he repeatedly acknowledges, like Aristotle, that matter is a scalar concept, as when he calls soul "matter" for Intellect, or specifies gold as matter for the bowl. Hence, depending on the context, a perceptible entity can be consistently viewed as either matter or form or composite. In his most mature metaphysics, Plotinus accepts this fluidity of perspective, up to a point (see VI.3.4–8). Just so, Aristotle's elements function both as the primary matter of a substance's perceptual changes, and as composites of two qualities (e.g., cold and moist), either one of which can serve as substrate when the other is transformed into its opposite. On this view, there is no need for a further reduction of matter to something completely amorphous.

Plotinus can accept this position, I think, for the analysis of particular phenomena, but not when it comes to fundamental ontology. Even in VI.3, with all its linguistic and conceptual sophistication, he is adamant that form can never actually accrue from matter or inform matter, which is "utterly irrational" and "a mere shadow": see VI.3.4, 16 and 7, 3–9. As a result, he cannot adopt Aristotle's notions of matter as source of change ("material cause") and as the persisting *constituent(s)* or material(s) of perceptible

substances. According to Plotinian metaphysics only formative principles can be causes and sources of change (cf. VI.7.2, 17 and VI.7.2, 24), because matter can never give the reason why. Thus for Plotinus, contra Aristotle, the form in a matter/form composite never becomes a property of the substrate: see Noble (2013), 254–256.

6, 16 *volume and magnitude*: For "volume" as the best translation of *ongkos*, see commentary on Ch. 11. Plotinus will return to the relation of these concepts to matter in Chapters 11 and 12.

6, 19 *indefinite* (*aoristos*): This characterization of substrate and matter becomes fundamental in Chapter 10. Aristotle sometimes presents matter and indefiniteness as a hendiadys (e.g., *Phys.* 4.2. 209b9), but his matter is always potentially something definite that can become actual, unlike the account Plotinus will give here. Plotinus devotes most of II.5 to an account of the way (prime) matter is a potentiality that never achieves actuality. If he already had this essay in mind when composing II.4 (seemingly the earlier one), that could help to explain the glaring omission of potentiality not only from the present chapter's account of matter but also from all the rest of this essay. In VI.1.26, 2, he makes the potentiality of matter the premise of his polemic against the Stoic postulate that matter is both corporeal and an amorphous principle of reality.

Chapter 7

Survey and criticism of Presocratic and Epicurean theories.

Having established persistence and indefiniteness as basic features of prime matter, Plotinus outlines and refutes the views of the four Presocratic philosophers whom Aristotle (*Metaph*. 12.2.1069b20–23) describes as seeming to have had "some notion of matter." Plotinus' choice of three of these figures—Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Atomists—also fits Aristotle's focus in *GC* 1.1. As his unnamed proponent of "the boundless" Plotinus now seemingly adds Anaximander. The Presocratic quartet's presence in relevant Aristotelian contexts goes a long way to explaining why Plotinus includes them at this point in II.4, but it does not go all the way. The four figures come up quite abruptly. Does Plotinus really need this chapter?

He does need it if he wants his own treatment of matter to withstand the objection that there are important theories that he has not yet considered, incorporated, or eliminated. He has begun this essay with generalizations about notions of matter, and disagreements about particular elucidations of the concept. In Chapter 1 he enumerates (1) corporealists, represented by Stoics, (2) Platonic and Aristotelian incorporealists, and (3) proponents of intelligible matter. By the end of Chapter 5, Plotinus has summarily disposed of the Stoic corporealists

and defended group (3), but he has not yet responded to group (2), whose main topic is the matter of perceptible entities, which will also be his own leading concern. In Chapter 6 he accepts "prime" matter from Aristotle for group (2), and in Chapter 10 he will add a version of Plato's Receptacle. But if that were all, the representatives of group (1) could cry foul because the corporealists, as well as Stoics, comprise the Presocratics treated by Aristotle and also the Epicurean Atomists. Assuming, as I think we should, that the Atomists of Chapter 7 include Epicurus as well as Leucippus and Democritus, we may plausibly regard this chapter as integral to Plotinus' dialectical strategy for the essay as a whole. The figures are not presented here as a mere doxographical interlude nor as an idle appropriation from Aristotle. By means of elimination, they clear the way for Plotinus to give his own account of physical matter from Chapter 8 onwards.

In its attribution of names and doctrines Chapter 7 resembles V.1.9. But in the latter context, where Plotinus also treats Anaxagoras and Empedocles, he cites them not to criticize but to invoke their support for his own doctrine of the One. (Calcidius, 279–282, includes a much more elaborate survey of early "matter" proponents, including Homer, Thales, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus.)

7, 1–2 *Empedocles*: The doxographical tradition had treated Empedocles' four "roots" as "matter" (DK 31 A

32), as Plotinus does here. In fact, however, Empedocles had no notion of a *changeable* substrate "underlying all generation and destruction" (which is described by Aetius as the philosophical sense of *hulê*, Diels, *Dox Gr* 307). Empedocles' "elements," as his four "roots" soon came to be called, were *everlasting and changeless* in their identity as earth, air, fire, and water, but subject to combination and separation, under the agencies of Love and Strife. Empedocles himself described these alternations as quasi-becomings and passings-away (DK 31 B17, 11–12). These words could account for Plotinus' reference to the elements' "destruction," which he did not find stated by Aristotle, though he may have interpreted Aristotle's criticism of Empedocles (*GC* 1.1.315a4–25) accordingly. Plotinus must have known that Empedocles' elements were not composites, and therefore not liable to destruction on that account. All he means, perhaps, is that earth, air, fire, and water are too transitory, in our experience of them, to serve as a permanent substrate for perceptible changes.

7, 2 *Counter-evidence*: Plotinus invokes the Epicurean notion of *antimarturêsis* (LS 18A), which already suggests that Epicurus was in his mind here as well as the early Atomists.

7, 2–13 *Anaxagoras*: Of all the Presocratics, Anaxagoras, it might seem, should receive the most sympathetic

treatment from Plotinus. His assignment of cosmological activity to *nous* ("the finest and purest of all things," DK 59 B12), and the passivity of "everything else" (DK 59 B13), draws a sharp distinction between mind and what we ordinarily call matter. This was not only an amazing philosophical innovation but also a strong move in subsequently Peripatetic and Platonic directions. However, Anaxagoras conceived of "everything else" as a comprehensive aggregate of all *actual* qualities and substances, and hence remote from Aristotelian *hulê*. He was also tarred with bad faith in Platonists' eyes for failing to show, according to Plato's Socrates, that the way his *nous* set everything in motion was for the best (*Phaedo* 98b–c). Plotinus, working from Aristotle and his own preconceptions, gives Anaxagoras no quarter.

7, 3 *the mixture* (*to migma*): This is Aristotle's word for what he calls "the one" of Anaximander, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras "from which they separate the rest of things" (*Phys.* 1.4.187a20–23; see also *Metaph.* 12.2.1069b20–23), and which Aristotle also calls these thinkers' "matter." Anaxagoras had said "all things were together" (DK 59 B1), which Aristotle quotes in *Metaph.* 1069b21, taking it to mean a primordial mélange.

7, 3–4 *Not a [mere] capacity . . . but has possession of everything in actuality*: Since matter, according to

Aristotle, *is* potentiality, Anaxagoras' "mixture" could not be matter if "it possesses everything in actuality" (*energeia*). For Anaxagoras, everything that *can* exist must already exist, in order to avoid the Parmenidean stricture on genesis from "not-being." Hence Anaxagoras did not envision Aristotelian potentialities. The word I translate by "capacity" is *epitêdeiotês.* At IV.3.23, 4 Plotinus uses it along with *dunamis*, which is Aristotle's standard term for potentiality. (For the use of *epitêdeios* in relation to matter by the earlier Platonist Atticus, see Boys-Stones, 110, and for its coupling with *dunamis*, see Alexander of Aphrodisias, above p. 20, text E). The absence of *dunamis* in II.4 is therefore noteworthy. Perhaps Plotinus avoids it here because matter, in his view, has no vestige of power, and is essentially without quality (unlike Alexander's description). See Chapter 11 below, line 28.

7, 4 *annihilates the Intellect*: This criticism of Anaxagoras develops from the previous one. His *nous* imparts circular motion to the primordial mixture, causing contrary types of things ("dense and rare, hot and cold") to separate off from one another, and thus bring about cosmology (DK 59 B12). What *nous* does not do is "give shape and form" (see Chapter 8, 14–15) to the things already in the mixture. Thus, in the eyes of Plotinus, Anaxagoras undermined the creative role of Intellect, though Anaxagoras actually

(ibid.) anticipated Plato's Demiurge in saying that "*nous* regulated everything."

7, 6 *simultaneity*: As before, Plotinus imposes his own notions on Anaxagoras. Plotinian Intellect = Being is "prior" to matter, but Anaxagoras' *nous* and mixture are "simultaneous" and thus coequal in status. This is impossible, according to Plotinus, because either (1) it reduces mixture to Being = Intellect, or (2) it conflates mixture and Intellect with Being, in which case a third Being would be needed to contain the mixture/Being and the Intellect/Being. I interpret the difficult Greek of lines 7–8 much in the way that Gerson does: "But if the mixture and the Intellect are both Being." However, that translation ignores the word "this" (*touto*) before "being" (*on*). Hence my translation: "If both the mixture and that other thing [Intellect] are *this* being." I take the word "this" to limit the word "being" in preparation for the deployment of the so-called Third Man argument—the need for a superior Being to embrace the being that comprises both mixture and Intellect (for the Third Man argument, see Plato, *Parmenides* 133e). I capitalize Intellect and Being, as Gerson does, in order to show that the words are used here in their Plotinian sense, but I disagree with that translation's switch between "Existent" and "Being" in the translation of *to einai* and *to on* in line 7 (similarly

Armstrong). Both Greek phrases should be rendered by "Being."

7, 9 *Demiurge [i.e., Intellect]*: Drawing on Plato, *Timaeus* 39e (paraphrased at III.9.1, 1–4), Plotinus regularly identifies Intellect with the creator Demiurge (e.g., II.9.6, 15), who models the physical world on the everlasting Forms. Hence Anaxagoras, if he had known these Platonic truths, should have recognized that his *nous* is "necessarily prior" to his putative matter ("mixture"). Because, according to Plotinus, "matter is without quality," it contains no Forms for Intellect to "busy itself endlessly sifting out." This is a tart allusion to the cosmogonical activity of rotation and separation, which Anaxagoras assigned his *nous* to initiate. Plotinian Intellect, by its very nature, has and actually *is* the Forms. Thus Intellect, from its own resources, can "extend quality and shape over all matter," not needing any sifting out.

7, 13 *everything in everything*: One of Anaxagoras' most quotable doctrines, cited by Aristotle at *Metaph.* 4.5.1009b27.

7, 14 *the proponent of "the boundless"*: *To apeiron*, which could also be translated by "the infinite" or "the unlimited," was the name of the primary cosmological principle advanced by the celebrated Milesian thinker Anaximander (see DK 12 B1). Aristotle mentions him specifically in

Physics 3.4. 203b15, but in the same sentence Aristotle says that most of the natural philosophers share the same view concerning the *apeiron*. This generalization may explain why Plotinus does not name Anaximander here. As I have noted above, in the commentary on Anaxagoras, Plotinus shows familiarity with other Aristotelian references to Anaximander in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics,* but what interests him in this context is not Anaximander's particular doctrine of *to apeiron* but the appropriateness of *apeiron* as a proper account of the physical world's matter. In Chapter 15 of this essay Plotinus will support such a position in great detail. How is it, then, that he appears to soundly reject it here? The main reason is the early Greek philosophers' usage of *apeiron* to describe the principle constituting the physical world as a boundless *magnitude*.

7, 15 *impossible to reach the end of*: If this is what *apeiron* means, Plotinus goes on to argue, it will not serve as a proper account of matter. The Greek word I have translated by "impossible to reach the end of," *adiexitêto*s, was seemingly coined by Aristotle in a context where he is arguing that there cannot be an actually *infinite* magnitude (*Phys.* 3.207b29). That impossibility, he continues, need not exclude *apeiron* from being an appropriate specification of matter if we take the term "infinite" or "boundless" not as something that is actually such, but as a "privation" of anything definite, and therefore something purely

potential. Plotinus will take issue with Aristotle's analysis of privation, but that is something to deal with later. His point here, in agreement with Aristotle, is that if *apeiron* is understood to mean actually infinite or boundless in magnitude (which is seemingly the way Anaximander and other early thinkers intended the word's sense) it will be no good as a specification of matter. At VI.6.17, 14, in a discussion of the sense of *apeiron* in the phrase "infinite number," Plotinus uses *adiexitêtos* again, arguing that one can always think of a larger number without implying that there actually is a number that you cannot get to the end of.

7, 16 *neither "a boundless in itself," nor . . . as the incidental attribute*: With this argument Plotinus excludes *apeiron* as the substantive existence or defining attribute of the physical world's matter. Thus he prepares for his later remarks concerning the unlimitedness of incorporeal and non-quantitative matter. Paraphrasing much of Aristotle, *Phys.* 3.5.204a20–34, he argues that absolute boundlessness is impossible either as something *per se* (as an entity consisting of infinitely many distinct parts) or as the attribute of a (finite) body. Matter, as he will say in Chapter 8, must be simple, that is, non-composite. The Pythagoreans, as Aristotle observes in this context, made *to apeiron* a "substantive principle," and Plotinus associates himself with Aristotle's dismissal of this proposition. To

underline the impossibility of absolute boundlessness, he calls it *autoapeiron,* meaning "boundless in itself," a word found nowhere else.

7, 20–28 Plotinus groups atoms with Empedoclean elements as physical concepts that reduce all things to bodies and fail to account for cosmic order (III.1.3, 1). Because atoms are everlasting, incomposite and lack primary qualities (hot, cold, etc.), they may look more promising as candidate for an amorphous substrate of the kind that Plotinus favors, but as indivisible and mindless magnitudes Plotinus takes them to be non-starters for his cosmology. We should take him to include both Democritus (cf. *Metap*h. 12.2, 1069b23) and Epicurus as representative Atomists in this inventory of matter theorists, but chiefly the latter, who is clearly his unnamed target in III.1.3 (where Plotinus mentions the notorious atomic "swerve") and criticized by name elsewhere (II.9.15, 8).

7, 20. *rank*: The Greek word *taxis* also means regular order, which atomic motions are precisely unable to maintain (cf. III.1.3, 3).

7, 21 *divisible at every point*: Plotinus seems to accept Aristotle's arguments concerning bodies' potential divisibility to infinity (*GC* I.2. 316b18–317a 9; cf. IV.7.8b, 19).

7, 22 *continuous and fluid*: Whereas atoms are discontinuous and impenetrable, Plotinus adduces continuity and fluidity as defining attributes of actual bodies. By fluidity (*hugron*) I take him to mean that ordinary bodies are relatively permeable (see II.7.2), and that their *matter* is capable of being suffused with all the qualities of a body.

7, 23 *without intellect and soul*: Plotinus plays the Platonists' trump card against mindless materialism for its inability to account for the natural world of living things. Some translators, including MacKenna and Gerson, capitalize "intellect" and "soul," presuming that Plotinus refers to his hypostatic entities. This could be right, but I find it more plausible to take the words to refer to a particular individual's soul and intellect. In the cosmological contexts of III.1.5, 1 and 6.1 "individual things" (*hekasta,* as here) are living beings. Note Perdikouri's apt comparison, in her commentary (138), of IV.3.3, 1–5, where Plotinus attacks Atomism for its presumption that soul and life can be made from combining atoms, which is exactly the impossibility that Plotinus asserts here in lines 23–24. His words seem inappropriate for reference to hypostatic Intellect and Soul, which are not "made" out of anything.

7, 25–26 *no demiurge*: The word *dêmiourgos* need not allude to the Platonic Demiurge (as it does above)

specifically but be simply the notion that the proximate matter used by any creative agent has to be composite (for instance a mixture of elements), not discontinuous (cf. V.9.3, 9–29).

7, 26 *Countless further criticisms of this theory [Atomism]*: see III.1.3, 10–29.

Chapter 8

Basic features of the matter of the perceptible world.

In this important chapter Plotinus outlines his own view of physical matter as unitary, incomposite, devoid of quality and quantity, unrestrictedly receptive, and incorporeal. Matter's lack of inherent quality had a pedigree that goes back to Plato's Receptacle, Aristotle's "ultimate substrate," and the Stoics' "prime matter." Plotinus' principal innovation is emphasizing matter's further lack of any determinate quantitative dimension. Plato in *Timaeus* 52b had described the receptacle as space (*chôra*), while the "prime matter" of Stoicism was *apoion sôma,* that is, a three-dimensionally extended magnitude "without quality" (see LS 44DE). Plotinus insists here that matter cannot be corporeal if it has no determinate properties. His greatest challenge, going forward, will be establishing matter's intrinsic lack of magnitude while also making it an essential contributor to the existence of bodies. (For an excellent discussion of the Platonic background, see Fleet (1995) 251–255). Although Plotinus is resolutely opposed to the Stoics' identification of "beings" with bodies (see VI.1.28, 7–10), his concept of matter's relation to form is otherwise comparable to the Stoics' notion of the passive principle's availability to be shaped in whatever ways the active principle or *logos* determines: cf. Origen,

De oratione (*SVF* 2. 318), aptly cited and discussed by Narbonne, 328–329. In both cases, matter is construed as simply the recipient of forms rather than being an essential component of them.

As Plotinus launches into his own philosophy, his prose becomes more fluid and limpid.

8, 1–2 *this unitary matter*: Aristotle had called matter as such "unitary" (*Phys.* 1.7. 191a12–13). Prime matter was also incomposite for the Stoics, who canonized the epithet "unqualified" (*apoios*), which Plotinus will also have known from his Platonist predecessors; see Dillon, *Alcinous* (1993), 91, and above on Chapter 1, line 13. Stoic matter was divisible through and through, which probably accounts for Plotinus' third attribute for it, "continuous," by contrast with the atoms dismissed at the end of Chapter 7.

8, 2–3 *evidently not a body*: If this argument is directed against Stoics, for whom prime matter was both a body *and* without quality, it begs the question by assuming that embodiment entails observable properties such as those that Plotinus proceeds to enumerate rather than simply satisfying the Stoic condition that "body is what has threefold extension together with resistance" (LS 45F). However, Simplicius describes Plotinus as having "proved" that it is impossible for primary matter to be body without quality (*In phys.* 229, 11–12). As Narbonne

notes in his commentary (251n117), Chapters 8 and 9 of II.4 are closely paraphrased by Simplicius. In his much later essay VI.1.29 (on which see Graeser [1972], 95–97) Plotinus criticizes the Stoic concepts of qualified (*poios*) and relative disposition (*pôs echon)* at length.

8, 6 *matter in relation to everything*: Plotinus' way of differentiating *this unitary matter* from proximate or relative matter such as potter's clay.

8, 12 *being magnitude . . . and having a magnitude*: Plotinus invokes Aristotle's distinction between essential or definitional being and contingent attributions (see *Metaph*. 7.6.1031a28–29 and 1031b11–14). Plotinus' point is that matter cannot *be* a magnitude any more than it can *be* a shape. As to its *having* a magnitude or a shape as an inherent property, that too he will exclude because matter is *deprived of everything*. For its "poverty, see Chapter 16, 21–22, and III.6.9, 37 (drawing on Plato, *Philebus* 63b). The conceptual distinction between being and having becomes crucial to his argument in Chapter 12 that matter is not a magnitude but something that can receive magnitude without being affected by it.

8, 15–16 *the donor of its shape*: From the similar passage at III.6.16, 1–4 we can identify "the donor" with formative principle (*logos*), which makes matter "the size that *it wants*." We can also infer from this passage that the

Beings (or Forms) of line 16, which supply the formative principles, are not metaphysically distinct but inherent in them. Thus the Beings furnish the *logoi* with the specific magnitudes and qualities appropriate for the latter to "reflect" onto the matter of the natural kinds; cf. III.6.17, 12–26 and III.8.2, 23–30, where Plotinus writes of nature as a *logos* that "makes" a product (for instance a visible shape) that it "gives" to the matter.

8, 20 *just as the maker wants*: Plotinus regularly connects Intellect and *logos* with wishing or willing, and with the good as their object: cf. VI.2.21, 42; and VI.8.6, 36–41. In the present context, we can suppose that the creative *logos* will "want" the magnitudes that it bestows.

8, 23 *the form comes upon matter*: Because Plotinian matter is purely receptive, with no content or substance or body, it does not, like the potter's clay, "become" anything or "have" anything or even "blend" with anything (as the Stoics' prime matter blends with the Stoic *logos*). The incorporeal formative principles "*come upon* it from elsewhere" (VI.3.2, 24) and their coming does not change it in any way (III.6.10).

8, 26 *quantity is determined together with the form*: This is Plotinus' most crucial and controversial claim in the chapter. If he is right, quantity and quality are coordinate as formative principles. You cannot eliminate quality

from prime matter, as the Stoics want to do, and retain quantity. That inter-entailment looks sound in regard to the formative principles for natural kinds, where size and shape must go together. It is less *evidently* effective in regard to prime matter (see commentary on lines 2–3 above). Matter's inherent lack of quantity as well as quality is strongly emphasized by Calcidius, 315–316, though he, unlike Plotinus, treats matter as pliable, changeable, affectable, and even desirous of form, 287, 308.

Chapter 9

Matter's intrinsic lack of magnitude and quantity.

Having argued that physical matter's lack of properties extends to quantity as well as quality, Plotinus devotes this and the next chapter to investigating how we can accept and conceive of a mode of being for matter that excludes magnitude. His responses to these questions foreshadow his greatest conundrum—how to account for matter's contribution to the composition of bodies (Chapters 11–12).

9, 3–4 *existing and having a quantity*: Although Plotinus criticizes Aristotle's categories in his later work (see VI.1.1–24), he draws on the doctrine here in his distinction between *to on* and *to poson*. Accordingly, we should translate *to on* by "existing" (as MacKenna and Armstrong do) and not by "being," as in Gerson's rendering. Plotinian matter belongs within his overall ontology as an "incorporeal nature," and as such it *exists.* Its special character, as he will explain later, is non-shape, that is, having no definite feature, and thus "other than" everything else, see Chapter 13, 26–32.

9, 5 *Quantity itself does not have quantity*: We could also translate: "Quantity itself is not *a* quantity," or "Quantity

itself is not something quantitative." See VI.1.23 for Plotinus' analysis of *to poson* in the sense of "*having* magnitude." Plotinian Forms do not involve the self-predication attributable to Plato's early metaphysics (see White [1992], 293–296), according to which the Forms instantiate the properties that particular things derive from them by "participation." Plotinus drives the point home with the argument that, although things become white by the presence of Whiteness, Whiteness itself is not a white color.

9, 9 *variegated formative principle*: Plotinus seems to refer to the kind of secondary *logos* (not the Form as such) that generates perceptible properties in matter as images of itself (see, for instance, III.8.2, 19–34 and III.6.16, 1–4). The *logos* itself of course will not be variegated or multicolored (*poikilos*), but Plotinus asks his readers to allow him to call it so because of the range of colors it can produce.

9, 11 *"how large something is"*: The Greek text is uncertain. I follow those modern editors who read *to ti pêlikon*, but my translation seeks to be more literal than others by bringing out the fact that the interrogative adjective *pêlikon* "how large?" is correlative with *têlikonde*, "this large," in the previous line. Plotinus uses the unusual noun *pêlikotês* to express "largeness," presumably to free up *megethos*, "magnitude," as the attribute that Largeness confers. Note that Armstrong strangely takes *to ti pêlikon*

as subject of the sentence and coordinate with Largeness and formative principle.

9, 15 *a magnitude that was previously absent*: This is the chapter's punch line. Quantity is not something that matter can be "unfolded" or "uncoiled" into like a previously wound-up rope. Matter never has any quantity or quality of its own. It exists simply as the conduit and receptacle of what it is "given" from outside itself.

Chapter 10

Indefiniteness as the way to think of matter.

Plotinus now turns to the question of how one can make sense of matter that has no magnitude. Since Chapter 6 the notion of matter as the substrate of bodies has been to the fore, but in the present chapter implicitly, and in Chapter 11 explicitly, the Receptacle notion returns to prominence. Echoes of *Timaeus* 50b–53b, where Plato presents the Receptacle, are strong in the first part of Chapter 10, but Plotinus goes far beyond Plato in spelling out the difficulties of describing this notion and of making it intelligible, not only to his specific readers, but also subjectively to anyone who tries to put their mind to it. The chapter is particularly interesting for Plotinus' skill and evident pleasure in grappling with the paradox of a being that is both foundational to the physical world and yet ultimately indescribable and unthinkable. Like Plotinus in Chapter 8, Plato had emphasized the Receptacle's completely amorphous nature, but he had not said that this nature included complete absence of magnitude. Moreover, by comparing the Receptacle to gold and calling it space, Plato could be interpreted as crediting it with intrinsic quantitative dimension and physical extension. Plotinus will have none of that here, though he will soon return to matter's relation to volume and face it head on. In the

present chapter he tackles matter's absence of magnitude as an issue to be addressed psychologically. In Chapters 11–12 he will discuss its ramifications for physics and metaphysics.

10, 3 *mental focus*: Plotinus once again (see p. 118) invokes an Epicurean criterion of truth (see LS 17A), perhaps because the expression (*epibolê tês dianoias*) was associated with accessing something by apprehending its image.

10, 3 *state of indefiniteness*: I follow Gerson in choosing this translation of *aoristia* in order to bring out the fact that the term in this psychological context signifies the *mental state* that Plotinus deems necessary for apprehending matter, to the qualified extent that matter can be apprehended. Outside this chapter *aoristia*, or more commonly the adjective *aoristos,* signifies the "indefinite" character of matter itself. The latter is Plotinus' favorite word to characterize both intelligible and physical matter. In reference to physical matter, here and elsewhere, "indefinite" is typically coupled with such other words as ugly, irrational, and unlimited. Aristotle had canonized *aoristos* as a description or name for matter (see *Physics* 4.2.209b9).

10, 3–4 *if like is thought by like*: Explaining cognition as a process of assimilation had been popular in Greek philosophy from the beginning. Plotinus adopted

it for sense perception (see IV.4.23). Given matter's indeterminacy, "the soul must try to reduce itself to the necessary state of indetermination" (see Blumenthal [1972], 76), as Plotinus says in lines 16–17.

10, 8 *the illusory look of matter will be spurious*: The words echo Plato, *Timaeus* 52b–c, where Timaeus says that the Receptacle has to be grasped by a kind of spurious reasoning and like an image (*eikôn* and *phantasma*) seen in a dream (cf. text A, p. 18 above).

10, 9–10 *composed of one feature that is not true*: The Greek is difficult, but less obscure than most translations render it. Plotinus frequently juxtaposes "one, and another" (*heteron, heteron*), which makes good sense here, rather than reading the second *heteron* as a reference to metaphysical "Difference" (with Kalligas and Gerson). I take "one feature that is not true" to refer to "the spurious image" and the "other feature" to be "the definite account of the indefinite," mentioned in line 5. My translation is closest to that of Perdikouri.

10, 12–17 *What is the soul's [state of] indefiniteness?*: Plotinus returns to the analogy of seeing in the dark that he had used in Chapter 5 for picturing the obscurity of matter. The invisible "residue" is accessed by the soul's eliminating everything luminous from its mental focus, since matter is inherently invisible (III.6.7, 14–15). The

standard Greek Lexicon of Liddell, Scott & Jones aptly renders *aoristia* here by "indecision." In line 13 I accept the MSS reading *apousia* (literally "absence"), rendering it by "mental blank."

10, 22–31 *When it thinks matter*: The soul cannot have any actual experience of matter, only a quasi-impression of it, because matter is too impotent to generate any direct cognition. Hence, as already explained in Chapter 5 and further elaborated in the present lines, apprehension of matter is an unfinishable process of trying to see in the dark and detach from matter every "surface feature" of the composite items of which it is the substrate. Plotinus is not much of a stylist in his typical prose, but here, especially where he writes of "thinking a dark thing darkly, and thinking it unthinkingly," his rhetoric is most effective in conveying the unbridgeable gap between mind and matter, in his understanding of these notions. Translations of lines 29–30 differ considerably, depending on their construal of the phrase *kataleipei ho logos*. Does it mean, as I render it with Armstrong, "what reason leaves over," meaning "what it leaves to be putatively thought," or what reason rejects or abandons or "has no access to" (which is Gerson's version)? "Leaves over" fits Plotinus' use of the verb elsewhere, and, more importantly, it is absolutely required by the philosophical context. The attempt to think matter is an analytical act of reason. Matter cannot be accessed as such, that is clear, but establishing that

fact is the outcome of reason's attempt to sift it out from the perceptible features of the composite item. Without reason, one could not even "think unthinkingly."

10, 34 *From distress . . . as if it were afraid*: The emotional tone is noteworthy. As *rational*, albeit fallen and embodied creatures, we cannot bear the thought of utterly "shapeless" matter because our kinship is with the determinate "beings" of the intelligible world. We think of the physical world as consisting of bodies that are composites of form and matter, but we cannot let bare matter enter our mindset and experience. In this way Plotinus approaches George Berkeley's doctrine that there can be no idea or knowledge of material substance as such, though he stops short of Berkeley's notorious inference that matter does not exist (see Long [2016], 53f.).

Chapter 11

Problems and solutions concerning matter's lack of magnitude.

In this difficult chapter, which is also the philosophical high point of the entire essay, Plotinus reaches the conclusion that matter "*takes* on the nature of volume." He does not say that matter actually *is* empty space but, rather, that we imagine its providing unlimited volume for magnitude to occupy (i.e., as being empty and unlimited three-dimensionality, cf. II.6.2, 13). Because matter is absolutely indefinite, we form the notion that it is intrinsically receptive of anything that has bulk, and therefore of any body. Unlike a modern materialist, Plotinus doesn't envision matter as the occupant of space, but rather as the precondition for space's occupancy by magnitudes. He interprets Plato's Receptacle as "the metaphysical basis for the development of geometrical and physical space"; see Sattler (2012), 193.

Before proceeding to the commentary, it will be helpful to recall the main steps of his preceding argument:

(1) As substrate, physical matter is not self-subsistent but only an image derived from the forms reflected in it.

(2) As receptacle, physical matter serves these fleeting forms as their place of conjunction, and as co-constituent of bodies.

(3) Physical matter itself is incorporeal, with no perceptible attributes of its own, including magnitude.

(4) Indefiniteness equips physical matter to be receptive of every formative principle including those derived from Largeness and Magnitude.

All these points recur in this chapter. As Narbonne shows in his excellent commentary, 226–230, Plotinus draws heavily on Aristotle's treatment of place, space, matter, and magnitude in *Physics* 4.2, where Aristotle has his sights on Plato's Receptacle. Note especially 209b6–13: "If we regard place as the *extension* of the magnitude, it is the matter. For this is different from the magnitude: it is what is contained and defined by the form. . . Matter or the indefinite is like this; for when the boundary and the attributes of a sphere are removed, nothing but the matter is left. This is why Plato in the *Timaeus* says that matter and space are the same." According to my reading of this and the next chapter, Plotinus completely adopts Aristotle's hypothetical identification of matter with place as the extension of the magnitude and as indefinite residue, while hedging his adoption of it with his characteristic disclaimers about defining matter categorically.

11, 1–13 In these lines Plotinus sets the chapter's agenda by issuing three challenges to his conception of matter as a size-less receptacle.

The first challenge, lines 1–3, has the form of a dilemma. Either (a) bodies have no need of a receptacle for their magnitude and qualities; or (b) if they have such a need, the receptacle itself must already have volume and therefore magnitude. Plotinus answers this dilemma in lines 13–27 by first rejecting (a). He then, in response to (b), breaks the tie between "volume" and "magnitude": matter *is* volume in the sense of being receptive of magnitude, but it has no definite magnitude itself.

The second challenge, lines 4–7, attacks the very notion of a size-less receptacle. Plotinus gives his rejoinder in Chapter 12, lines 8–13 and 20–26.

The third challenge, lines 7–13, repeats the charge of redundancy, by arguing that "the primary bodies" can be adequately explained by reference to forms without additional need for matter. Plotinus gives his response in Chapter 12, lines 13–20.

Many commentators (see Armstrong, 130n1, and Perdikouri, 152–153) think that Plotinus is airing objections that have already arisen in the Platonic tradition or have been brought against incorporeal matter by Stoic critics. Such a background may well exist, but it does not seem to be essential for understanding the text. For the sake of brevity as well, I prefer to treat the challenges as ones that Plotinus could have made for himself, and

thus to view them as part and parcel of his dialectical methodology. Size-less matter, as he has been showing since Chapter 9, is dear to his heart. In arguing, as he has already done, that matter must be unquantified if it is also unqualified, he made a very powerful point. But he also shows himself to be well aware that size-less matter seems an affront to common sense (the first challenge above).

11, 1–2 *Why does the composition of bodies need anything in addition to magnitude and all qualities?*: The question goes to the heart of Plotinus' axiom that matter is incorporeal. In that case, why do bodies need it? Or, if they need a receptacle, does that amount to more than a reassertion of their requirement of magnitude?

11, 3 *volume*: The word *ongkos*, which I translate by "volume," is generally, but most misleadingly, rendered by "mass"; contrast Narbonne, 293, and Sorabji (1988), 31, whom I follow here. Mass or bulk is indeed the most frequent meaning of *ongkos*, as Plotinus' questioner implies here by his inference from *ongkos* to *megethos* (magnitude), but that translation begs the question and also wrecks the subtlety of Plotinus' rejoinder. In standard English usage, "mass" is the amount of matter an object contains, while "volume" is how much space it takes up. As Plotinus argues in his response at line 14ff., *ongkos* can be void and therefore need not imply any physical mass or determinate

magnitude; it can simply signify the three-dimensional space that provides any such magnitude with its room. Thus *ongkos* would satisfy the standard mathematical definition of body (see LS vol. 2, 273) but not the Stoic definition, which adds resistance and tangibility to three-dimensional extension. At II.7.1, 43 *megethos* coexists with *ongkos*, but not conversely, according to the present text. And at III.7.8, 43 Plotinus refers to the "extension" (*diastêma*) of *ongkos*, meaning any distance or extent, irrespective of its numerical measure.

11, 6 *extension*: The interlocutor supposes that matter's relation to extension must be its provision of determinate quantity to body rather than its making bodies receptive to being spatially extended.

11, 10 *primary bodies*: Originally I had taken this expression to be a reference to Aristotle's four elements, which he calls primary bodies (*GC* 2.3.330b6), see above Chapter 6. As described in that work, the primary bodies are composites of form and matter, as Plotinus himself has presented them as being and as he will retort in Chapter 12, line 14. But here he is speaking in the voice of the interlocutor, challenging his own notion that size-less matter is a possible and necessary component of bodies. Perdikouri, 155–156, has persuaded me that the allusion is not to Aristotle, but to the primary geometrical bodies of

Plato, *Timaeus* 57c7–d5, which are described as displaying an infinite variety when they are mixed together. If the bodies, in this passage, have not yet entered the Receptacle (as Perdikouri plausibly supposes in her commentary), so as to be winnowed out by its shaking, that would explain the statement by Plotinus' interlocutor that they do not "necessarily require matter." While this would be a questionable reading of Plato's context (see Johansen [2004], 117–127), it is good enough to issue Plotinus with an appropriate challenge. However, the interlocutor's attempt to wave matter away by adducing the primary bodies' affinity with "actions, makings, etc." is a curious move, and utterly remote from the *Timaeus* context. The allegedly common factor is being "a constituent of reality" with no part in physical matter. Plotinus repeats the collocation, "actions, makings" in III. 8.7, 10, but there, writing in his own Platonist identity, he plays down their independent ontological status, treating actions and makings as simply instrumental to the contemplation of "real beings."

11, 13 *empty name*: This is a familiar Greek expression for something that makes no sense, but here Plotinus also seems to intend a pun on the notion of "void volume" (line 28); for in Greek philosophy generally (with the exception of Epicureanism) an intra-cosmic void had been supposedly impossible.

11, 16 *everything together*: One of Plotinus' favorite expressions for both the unity of being and for the intellectual grasp of that unity (e.g., V.9.6, 8). The mind needs to be both non-qualified and non-quantified, in order that its apprehension and receptivity be uninfluenced by the quality and quantity of what it grasps.

11, 20–27 *it is the way animals and plants*: Plotinus skillfully invokes biological development to support his claim that quality and quantity grow and diminish in tandem. Both the "pre-existing magnitude" and "the shaping agent" must be formative principles or *logoi*. In saying that the former "is substrate" for the latter, Plotinus avails himself of the Aristotelian doctrine that what is form in one context can be substrate or matter in another context (cf. VI.3.4, 26–37). With this argument, Plotinus grants that the relative matter of living creatures has inherent magnitude derived from their forms, but he denies that absolute matter or matter as such must possess volume or magnitude in advance of its reception of anything. Hence, by lines 25–27, Plotinus concludes that he has refuted the first challenge concerning matter's necessary possession of magnitude.

11, 28–29 *illusory look of volume because its capacity for volume is primary*: Plotinus repeats (Chapter 10, line 9) Plato's word for the mental image (*phantasma*) of the

receptacle. In III.6.7, 13 he describes matter as "a phantom and an illusory look of *ongkos* [here meaning bulk], a striving for substantiality." In translating *epitêdeiotês* (see Chapter 7, line 3) by "capacity" here, I want to bring out Plotinus' irony in coupling matter's potentiality for any volume with its spatial emptiness. The dual character of matter as both nothing in itself and yet indefinitely any size is the theme of the chapter's final paragraph. Plotinus derives "some people's identification of matter with void" from Aristotle, *Phys.* 4.7.214a13, who seems to include Plato (cf. 209b12–13, where Aristotle says that Plato identified matter with space).

11, 34–35 *"great-and-small." . . yet no magnitude*: Plato's terminology for what Aristotle calls "matter" (*Phys.* 1.4.187a17, *Metaph.* 1.7. 988a26). Plotinus underlines his refutation of the chapter's first challenge by denying that possession of volume entails having magnitude.

11, 37–38 *intrinsic receptivity of magnitude*: This is the closest Plotinus will come to giving a positive account of matter. Note that he immediately attaches to this phrase the qualification that matter "is to be imagined like this," warning his readers not to make the mistake of thinking that he has characterized matter as it is objectively or in itself. Yet, his description of its being entirely "malleable"

(*euagôgos*, 42), recalls the positive plasticity of the Stoics' prime matter.

11, 43 *it takes on the nature of volume*: Other translations include "acquires" (Armstrong) or "acquired" (Gerson). The former is preferable because *eskhe* should not be rendered with a past tense. Yet "acquires" misleadingly implies that matter actually obtains the nature of volume. I prefer a translation that registers the way matter subjectively presents itself in relation to *ongkos*; cf. MacKenna's version: "it has that much of the character of mass."

Chapter 12

In spite of its lack of magnitude, matter is something real and a fundamental contributor to bodies.

In this chapter Plotinus continues his response to the challenges he issued at the beginning of the previous chapter. Matter has no intrinsic magnitude, but far from that excluding its contribution to bodies, lack of actual magnitude is what makes matter fundamental to bodies, as he forthrightly declares in line 1. Bodies are composed out of form and matter. If matter were already a magnitude, the formative principles of bodies would lack a container for the magnitudes that these *logoi* confer on matter in constituting bodies; and they could only transmit these properties to our minds. Matter serves as this receptacle and also as the unitary location for the assemblage of qualities including magnitude that come together in the formation of individual bodies. And although matter is not essential to actions as such, it *is* essential to the agents of actions as their continuing substrate. Matter's necessity as the receptacle of quality and magnitude makes it essential to bodies. It is invisible, obscure, and incorporeal, but none of these things should cast doubt on its existence and necessity to the physical world.

12, 1 *Matter does contribute hugely to bodies*: This ringing sentence picks up the challenge issued in Chapter 11, line 5, that size-less matter could not *contribute* (*sumballein*) to the composition of bodies. The superlative *ta megista*, which I translate by "hugely," means literally "the largest things." Given matter's lack of magnitude, the sentence is a deliberate oxymoron. Matter cannot confer anything literally large, so its huge contribution to the composition of bodies is instrumental, not corpuscular.

12, 2–3 *could not come to be connected with magnitude*: Having said that bodily forms are "in" magnitudes, Plotinus switches to the preposition *peri*, rendered here by "connected with" (other translations of *peri* could be "around" or "about" or "concerning") to describe how the forms deploy their relationship to matter. Because matter itself has no magnitude, nothing can be literally located "in it." "Connected with" provides a looser expression for the relation of magnitudes and all perceptible forms to matter as their receptacle and substrate. Narbonne aptly compares II.7.3, 10 where the formative principles that create bodies must not "include" (*sumperilambanein*) the matter, but yet need to "be connected with" it (*peri hulên*). As explained in Chapters 8–9, magnitude as such, i.e., the ideal form, is no more large than whiteness is white. Formative principles, therefore, in order to make things large, need connection not with largeness as such but

with that which they can make large by their presence, that is, matter. See III.6.16–17 for a much more detailed account of the way formative principles reflect magnitude on matter without rendering matter itself of any size.

12, 7 *a single thing*: Matter serves as the unitary locus or connection for the multiple formative principles that combine to generate individual bodies. In this role, matter functions not only as the receptacle and substrate of forms but also as the subject (the logical sense of *hupokeimenon*) on which formative principles confer specific identity as an individual physical entity—a flower, a table, etc.

12, 8–13 In these obscure lines Plotinus turns to empirical illustrations of matter's importance to the formation of bodies, such as we might observe in the mixture of copper and tin, to make bronze (my example, not his). The point seems to be that it is the respective material components of the copper and tin (as it might be) that unite in the formation of a new body, not the incorporeal formative principles.

12, 8 *For as we see in daily life*: My translation and interpretation are indebted to Armstrong, who writes: "We can see that this is so." The Greek phrase *epei kai nun* is repeatedly used in the *Enneads*, to focus the reader on the here and now: cf. III.6.16, 15 and IV.3.26, 51.

the components of compounds: The Greek is imprecise but must, I think, refer to pre-existing bodies, in view of the reference to bringing "its own matter," and to conform to the way elsewhere Plotinus uses the verb *meignumi*, "to mix," for the blending of bodies. The matter that the components "bring" to the mixture must be proximate matter, not matter that is absolute and shapeless.

to acquire a unified identity: A literal translation would be "arrive at the same thing," but what could this cryptic phrase mean in this context? Armstrong translates by "come to identity" and Gerson by "come to the identical place." I presume that "the same thing" signifies the convergence of the two matters in the production of a new compound. My thinking has been influenced by the helpful commentary of Perdikouri, 170.

12, 11 *there is also a need, all the* same: We have just been told that the components of the mixture need nothing else to be connected with besides the matter that they bring to the new compound, so it is jarring to be told that these components still have a need. This jolt in the sense explains why all the manuscripts are unanimous in writing *homôs*, meaning "all the same," or "nonetheless." Hence I don't understand why modern editors delete the word. The constituents' need here, I take it, is not for some further thing to facilitate their mixture, but for a location (a "vessel or a place") to accommodate them in

their compounded formation. Whether this refers to a physical container like a jar or to unoccupied matter as such is quite unclear from the text.

12, 12 *place is posterior to matter*: As we learned in Chapter 11, occupied matter "takes on the nature of volume," but matter as such is not a volume or location. Bodies "have a prior need of matter" in order to be magnitudes. The formative principles that enter matter create the "place" for the ensuing magnitudes to occupy: see III.6.17, 27–29. Stoics held that place is co-extensive with bodies (*SVF* 2.507), so Plotinus may intend to be combatting Stoic notions of body and matter here, as he does at great length in VI.1.25–30.

12, 13–20 This paragraph is a response to the charge made in Chapter 11, lines 8–13; see commentary there on "primary bodies." Plotinus agrees that actions, since they are incorporeal, are "without matter," but that has no bearing on the necessity of matter to bodies, which is this chapter's thesis. Bodies, unlike actions, are composites of matter and form, and the agents of actions are bodies. Their matter, though not part of actions, provides the "substrate" of agency" by remaining "within" the body of agents as they act. Even agents themselves, who are of course bodies, can be regarded as the continuing matter of their successive actions; see commentary on Chapter

3, lines 1–5. Here Plotinus seems to draw on the notion of proximate matter as the continuant through change in the way that an Aristotelian "subject" (like the man who changes from unmusical to musical in *Physics* 1.7) persists through changes of form. However, I don't think that Aristotle ever applies the term substrate to agents as distinct from patients.

12, 22 *not an empty name*: Plotinus now states his conclusion to the main challenge mounted in Chapter 11, lines 1–13, concerning the credentials of size-less matter. The challenger has argued that the essential constituents of body are qualities and magnitude, leaving size-less matter an empty name. Plotinus summarily states his conclusion, which turns the tables by tying the existence of body (*qua* qualities plus magnitude) to the existence of size-less matter.

12, 24 *by the same argument*: We should take these words in a strictly logical sense as an implicit deployment of the first two Stoic indemonstrable inference schemes (LS 36A), *modus ponens* (If p, then q; p; therefore q) and *modus tollens* (If p, then q; not-q; therefore not-p). Thus, let p be qualities-and-magnitude, and q be size-less matter. Then according to Plotinus' main argument in the chapter, the existence of qualities-and-magnitude, which the challenger accepts, entails the existence of size-less

matter, which the challenger calls an empty name. The "same argument" can be formulated in reverse (in the form of *modus tollens*), thus showing that the negation of qualities-and-magnitude (contrary to the challenger's postulate) follows from the rejection of size-less matter. Hence this version of the argument reaffirms the inter-entailment of matter and qualities-and-magnitude, and therefore matter's necessity to bodies. Plotinus regularly makes use of Stoic logic, but this passage is unusual in the formal validity that we can ascribe to the phrase "same argument."

12, 25–26 *could be said to be nothing if taken just on its own*: The beginning of an *a fortiori* argument. Far from matter's being an "empty name," that description would apply, rather, to any quality and magnitude in the absence of matter as its receptacle. Phenomenal forms, unlike intelligible forms, cannot be free-floating; to be actual, they have to be predicated of a particular subject or substrate.

12, 27 *though obscurely in each case*: Continuing the a *fortiori* argument, Plotinus revels in his retorts, verging on paradox, to naïve empiricism. Matter, as he has already said, is knowable only by spurious reasoning, yet there are more grounds to postulate its existence than there are for presuming the existence of phenomenal qualities. The "obscure" manner (*amudrôs*) of the latter's existence

is presumably relative to the clarity of their intelligible archetypes; cf. V.1.6, 46 on soul needing to look to *nous* owing to its *amudros logos*. Generally, however, in the *Enneads* it is matter that is described as *amudros*, see above Chapter 10, 30.

12, 32 *body is the object of touch*: In emphasizing matter's inaccessibility by touch, Plotinus continues to tease readers who may have sympathized with the challenges concerning its irrelevance to the composition of bodies (similarly III.6.6, 33–36). The tangibility of bodies had been a prima facie criterion of existence, see, for instance Plato, *Sophist* 246a and Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.304. Matter, however, is not "evident" to touch or to any other sense, and reason can apprehend it only "in an unthinking and empty way." Can matter really, then, as the chapter announced in its first line, "contribute hugely to bodies"?

12, 34 *as we have said*: The reference is to Chapter 10, line 11, where Plotinus quotes Plato's phrase "spurious reasoning," *Timaeus* 52b2.

12, 34–37 *But isn't even corporeality [then] connected with matter?*: These are very difficult lines, so my interpretation of them is inevitably conjectural. (I have wondered whether the particle *oun* has dropped out of the text before *oude,* so as to read *all' oun*, meaning "but in that case." Plotinus frequently uses this phrase in interrogative and dialectical

contexts [e.g., III.7.9, 71 and V.5.1, 9]; the insertion of *oun* could smooth my interpretation of the Greek.) According to standard readings, the text makes the statement that corporeality is *not even connected* with matter. If that is what Plotinus is saying, there is a glaring contradiction with II.7.3, 9–11, which asserts that corporeality *must* be "a rational principle (*logos*) in connection with matter (*peri hulên*)." Apart from this contradiction, matter, according to the metaphysics of this entire book, could not be the receptacle of bodies without such a connection to corporeality. In the preceding context we have been told that matter "has no connection" with any of the five senses, but can only be grasped in a spurious way by reason. Treating the problematic sentence as a question rather than a statement, I interpret it as a continuation of the dialectical back-and-forth with the challenger, taking it as a rejoinder to the putative rhetorical question: "But, given the claims made about matter's contribution to bodies, must matter not be connected with corporeality?"

Instead of answering yes or no, Plotinus, on my reading of the ensuing lines, poses a dilemma for the challenger. (1) "If corporeality is a quite independent rational principle (as he himself maintains), its relation to matter cannot be identity." (2) If, on the other hand, corporeality has blended with matter, matter will have lost its incorporeal identity and taken on the nature of body" (cf. II.7.2, 38, for density as the defining quality of corporeality). The

point of the dilemma is to conclude the response to the challenge concerning size-less matter. Matter is neither the same as corporeality nor is it the same as body. Yet, thanks to its anomalous and phantom nature as the repository of volume, matter has a connection with both corporeality (the rational principle) and with bodies (its potential occupants).

In support of what I call the second horn of the dilemma, "If corporeality had already been engaged in manufacture . . .," I refer again to II.7.3. This passage begins by asking whether corporeality is the assemblage of a body's constituents or a form and rational principle "that manufactures a body by becoming present in the matter." Settling on the latter, the passage continues by distinguishing "the body as matter and immanent *logos*" from the form that is inseparable from matter but conceptually distinct from it. There is no strong reason to emend the text, as Gerson does in his translation.

Chapter 13

Perceptible matter is neither a positive nor a negative quality.

Having disposed of matter's relation to corporeality, Plotinus turns his attention from physics to metaphysics. In this chapter and up to the end of the essay, his focus will be on matter's ontological status. For this purpose he draws heavily but also critically on Aristotelian notions, especially the notion of "privation" (*sterêsis*), which will constitute his final account of matter's complete negativity and otherness.

13, 1–2 *some kind of quality, a common one that exists in each of the elements*: This is a surprising and difficult phrase. Since Plotinus has been emphasizing matter's lack of quality in earlier chapters, the supposition that the substrate might actually *be* a quality seems uncalled-for, even though the idea will be immediately challenged, and by the end of the chapter firmly rejected. We can best understand the train of thought by associating the denial at the end of Chapter 12 that matter is corporeality (see Perdikouri, 180) with the mention of elements here. The four elements are the most basic forms of bodies, and "more matterish" than bodies like animals and plants (VI.3.9, 4). If matter itself can come in degrees of more

and less, that might seem to imply that it is a variable quality. While *incorporeal* matter could not directly make the elements bodies, might it, nonetheless, contribute "a common quality" to the elements by being the substrate of them all? According to the Stoic theory of corporeal matter, as presented in Chapter 1, the elements not only have a material substrate but actually are a disposition of matter, and they collectively constitute the "unqualified substance" that the Stoics called matter (DL 7.137). As Plotinus now begins to develop his account of matter in terms of *what it is not*, he momentarily raises a question about matter's role in the composition of elements, calling Stoic corporeality to mind. In IV.4.31, 33 "hot, cold and the like" are the primary "qualities" of the elements.

13, 5 *though itself lacking matter and magnitude*: This phrase, referring to "qualified" (*poion*) not "substrate" (which is how it is construed by Gerson), seems to amplify the absurd implications of the supposition that the substrate itself could be a quality or qualification. Qualities and qualifications require location in matter and magnitude as *their* substrate; they cannot also serve as a size-less substrate to themselves. Cf. 1.8.10, 7: "The qualified is an attribute and in something else, whereas matter is not in something else but is the substrate and what the attribute is connected with." In II.6.3, 17–20, probably written at much the same time, Plotinus characterizes

quality (*poiotês*) as the perceptible trace or image of a substance. That notion would further undermine the supposition that "shapeless" and incorporeal matter (cf. V.9.3, 20) could be a quality, or that quality could be the essential foundation of anything.

13, 5–7 The "common quality" supposition is neatly concluded by a dilemma. If the putative quality is definite, it cannot be matter; but if it is indefinite, it cannot be a quality. The second horn of the dilemma, "it is something indefinite," has been repeatedly endorsed, and emphasized most strongly in Chapter 10.

13, 7–14 Shifting ground from a "quality common to the elements," the imaginary interlocutor continues to press the supposition that matter may somehow, in spite of being "unqualified" (*apoion*, line 7, mistakenly translated in Armstrong by "something qualified"), be a quality. Things can be "qualified" by negative attributes, such as a blind person's lack of sight. Thus even if matter is entirely and uniquely without all normal qualities, as it is repeatedly described as being, e.g., IV.7.3, 8 and VI.9.7, 13, does this special characteristic not make matter "qualified" in virtue of its complete privation of positive qualities? The question is pertinent because matter has hitherto been *characterized*, albeit in consistently negative terms, as shapeless, size-less, indefinite, etc. Plotinus' dismissal of

the question in what follows is not likely to gain much sympathy from readers not already wedded to his fine-grained and sometimes irritating distinctions. We should also keep in mind, however, that matter's lack of positive quality is essential to its capacity to receive "impressions" of all things (VI.9.7, 14).

13, 8 *participate*: A technical term in Platonism, especially to indicate ontological dependence.

13, 10–11 *special character . . . as a kind of privation*: I reserve full discussion of this originally Aristotelian term for Chapter 14. The crucial point to note here is Plotinus' provisional identification of matter with privation "completely." In Aristotle, by contrast, "privation" does not characterize matter as such but one of the two contrary features that inhere in proximate matter as a substrate, the other contrary being "form." According to his usage, the terms privation and form are correlative. They mark out the termini of changes that a substance may undergo, from *not being F* (lacking some form or quality or quantity) to *being F* (having the form), and conversely changing from *being F* to *not being F*. In one context, as we shall see in discussing Chapter 16, Aristotle does attach a negative connotation to privation, but for the most part his use of the term is entirely neutral, any evaluative

content having to do not with privation as such (being cured is the good privation of sickness) but the context of the subject's change of form. In Plotinus, by contrast, "privation," signifies permanent deprivation or absence of positive form, as exemplified here in the case of someone (presumably incurably) blind. Judging from Plutarch, who frequently uses *sterêsis*, the term was already well entrenched in the toolkit of Platonists. (Although Plato does not use the word in his genuine works, his use of the corresponding verb in logical contexts such as *Soph.* 260a very probably inspired Aristotle's technical usage.) Plutarch knows *sterêsis* along with *eidos*, as one of Aristotle's "underlying causes" of coming to be (*Moralia* 370E). He also prefigures Plotinus in associating *sterêsis* with matter (ibid. 414D), negation of being and inaccessibility by the senses (947A), unlimitedness (925E), and impotence (946B). However, Plutarch stops short of treating privation of form as inherently ugly and bad, as Plotinus will do in Chapter 16.

13, 14–27 Here Plotinus responds to the proposal that matter's lack of quality could render it peculiarly "qualified" as a privation. He charges the interlocutor with making the absurd inference that "not qualified" implies *being qualified* negatively, as "distinct from being "non-qualified" or being *other* than qualified, an inference that would conflate contradictory and contrary. Matter, to be sure,

is privation (as will be fully established by the end of the essay), but privation is not to be deemed a quality but complete absence of quality.

13, 18 *absolute Otherness*: The ensuing discussion presupposes Plato's use of "other," in *Sophist* 257b, to signify the ontological attribute of difference as distinct from simple linguistic negation. My comments are no more than a tentative shot at understanding the tortuous pattern of thought. Thus: matter is something different from what is *qualified*; that difference makes it "not qualified," meaning that matter falls quite outside any notion of quality. Should the interlocutor make the rejoinder that matter is *qualified* by virtue of its being *other*, a dilemma is available. If matter's being *other* means that it is identical to absolute Otherness (*autoeterotês*, a word Plotinus probably coined for this context), that wouldn't make matter *qualified*, because even Quality as such is not something qualified (according to Plotinus' rejection of a Form's self-predication, see above on Chapter 9). Alternatively, if matter's otherness is not intrinsic to it, that would exclude "being other" from being an essential feature of matter as such.

13, 20 *owing to Otherness*: See Chapter 5, lines 28ff., where this intelligible principle is described as the source of matter. Plotinus reinforces matter's lack of intrinsic

qualification by observing that its identity as matter is due not to itself but to the correlative principle of Sameness. For distinctiveness and self-identity, as due to these two principles, see V.1.4, 40–43.

13, 22–23 *negation . . . affirmation*: Plotinus uses *sterêsis*, the word for privation, to signify the opposite of "form" (*eidos*). As already observed, Aristotle is his source for this contrast, but Plotinus never uses "privation" in Aristotle's characteristic way to explain what a substance *changes from* when it acquires a new form. In this passage, as elsewhere, Plotinus treats privation as the term for a lack or absence that is permanent and impossible to redress. Of his more than forty instances of the word, the great majority occur either in this essay or in I.8, where he uses the word in reference to matter's ugliness and badness.

13, 23–32 *special character is non-shape*: MacKenna captures the point nicely by rendering matter's character as "unshape." Hence matter's privation of shape or form undermines the chapter's initial suggestion that it could have some quality, if only the quality of being completely unqualified. Its special character, accordingly, is relational, not intrinsic—its being *other* than other things. It is *other than* everything else, not because it has any definite quality or form to mark its difference, as other things do, but because it is *only other*. As the heir of Plato's Receptacle, Plotinian matter shares that amorphous

principle's character in having no "inherent characteristics of its own" (*Timaeus* 51a). Plato, however, makes no comment on the Receptacle's value, whether positive or negative. For Plotinus, as he proceeds, matter's lack of form not only disqualifies it from being anything definite, but also renders it ugly and bad. These attributes seem to give matter precisely the negative *characterization* that this chapter has been at such pains to reject.

Chapter 14

What is the relation of perceptible matter to privation?

In this chapter Plotinus returns to the Aristotelian theory of matter that he has already outlined in Chapter 6. There he explains the necessity of a persisting substrate to receive the forms of bodies as they change, including the four elementary bodies in particular. He also distinguishes the proximate matter of a composite item such as a golden bowl from completely amorphous "prime matter," describing the latter as "indefinite in as much as it is not form." What he completely omits from that earlier chapter is privation, which characterizes an attribute or attributes that the matter presently lacks or "is not." The relevance of privation to Aristotelian matter had been to account for a substance's potentiality for change, with form and privation sharing mutually exclusive, equal and successive roles in the vicissitudes of the substrate. Plotinus, by contrast, will propose that matter is always, essentially and only privation; it never takes on or loses any form in its function as pure substrate and receptacle. Having invoked privation in Chapter 13 as a leading candidate to specify the negative essence of his own physical matter, Plotinus brings Aristotle back by unmistakable allusions, as his main interlocutor or rather contestant. To establish the identity of matter with privation, Plotinus needs first to

refute Aristotle's doctrine that the two concepts, though they may coincide contingently, are intrinsically different from one another.

14, 1–2 *what privation is connected with*: For the translation "connected with" see commentary on Chapter 12, lines 2–3.

14, 3–4 *one in substrate but two in account*: These words refer to three statements by Aristotle concerning the substrate and the attributes that it acquires or loses in the process of change: (1) "the substrate, though it is one in number, is not one in form or account" (*Phys*. 1.7. 190a15–17); (2) "the substrate is something different from the contraries" [i.e., form and privation] (ibid. 190b34); and (3) "we [non-Platonists] say that matter and privation are different, and that one of the pair [matter] is not-being contingently, but the other [privation] is not-being intrinsically. They on the other hand identify their 'great and small' [a Platonic term that Aristotle assimilates to his 'substrate'] with not-being" (ibid. 1.9.192a3–7). According to the third passage, Platonists err in conflating the substrate with absolute not-being.

We will need to return to this passage and its sequel for the commentary on Chapter 16. The point that concerns us here is Aristotle's insistence that the substrate cannot be identified simpliciter with privation and not-being.

By refuting that proposition, to which Plotinus devotes this entire chapter, we can presume that he sees himself as defending Aristotle's Platonists. Much can be said about why the success of that refutation is so important to him; cf. O'Brien (1996), who shows that "the rejection of Aristotle's distinction between matter and privation is . . . a crucial element in Plotinus's whole conception of the sensible world" (180). But our immediate task is to understand the steps of his argument, which he lays out here with unusual formality.

14, 3–17 As the parentheses with Roman numerals in the translation indicate, Plotinus here considers "three possible combinations that could be at play in the relation between the definitions of matter and of privation" (see Kalligas, 323, who should be consulted on the most relevant texts of Aristotle and the Aristotelian commentators).

(i) Neither matter nor privation is included in the account of the other: lines 8–12.

(ii) Both matter and privation are included in both accounts: lines 12–14.

(iii) Only one of them is included in the account of the other: lines 14–17.

According to these formulations, Aristotle's position is captured by (i): substrate and privation each differ from one another in their definitions, though matter is contingently privation (not-being). Thus, to use Aristotle's

example when he introduces the notions of substrate and privation in *Physics* 1.7.190a17: "Not being musical" (privation) is essentially different from "being a man" (substance) but a man can be non-musical (coincide in substrate with the privation).

14, 11 *not even potentially*: A non-musical man may have the potentiality to become musical, but that potentiality does not belong to "being non-musical" (the privation) itself. Curiously, this is the only instance in all of II.4 where Plotinus mentions the term "potentially" (*dunamei*).

14, 12–14 *related like the snub nose to snubness*: To illustrate the interdependence (but non-identity) of the accounts of matter and privation (formulation ii), Plotinus invokes Aristotle's discussion of the relation of the attribute "snubness" to the substance "snub nose" (*Metaph.* 7. 5.1030b28–35). Aristotle's topic there concerns so-called "coupled terms," meaning attributes like snubness, which cannot be defined independently from the substance, i.e., nose, of which they are essentially predicated. (See Plotinus II.6.2, 11 for snub-nosed as a "completing element" of a nose of a certain quality.) To fit Plotinus' context, we should identify snubness with privation, and snub nose with substrate. Thus the attribute snubness presupposes the substance snub nose, and snub nose presupposes

snubness, but the attribute and the substance remain essentially distinct.

14, 14–17 *related like fire to heat*: We now turn to the third type of non-identity between substrate and privation, whereby only one of the pair is included in the account of the other. Plotinus uses heat to exemplify an essential attribute and fire to exemplify substance or substrate. Heat is essential to the account of fire, but fire is not essential to the account of heat. If matter were privation in the essentialist way that fire is hot, the privation could not simply *be* matter as such. Rather, the privation would have to be a "form" of matter, leaving matter itself as the substrate, and so distinct from the form. Plotinus' phraseology is clumsy, because of the way he expresses the protasis and apodosis of the conditional clause: "If matter is privation in the [essential] way that fire is hot, privation will be a sort of form of matter," which is a bafflingly worded statement of a counterfactual hypothesis. What he means, I take it, is that one cannot suppose matter to be essentially privation in the way that fire is essentially hot because the hotness of fire presupposes matter not as privation but as substrate that contains the privation. Therefore, once again, matter and privation are not the same. Heat's necessity to fire and difference from fire go back to Plato, *Phaedo* 103d2. Plotinus likes the examples of heat and fire, to illustrate the relation of an essential

form or attribute to its material substrate; see II.6.1, 33 and IV.7.11, 4.

14, 17–28 These lines propose two further ways of distinguishing the accounts of matter and privation (Aristotle's doctrine), but they also advance Plotinus' agenda by emphasizing privation's status as absolute not-being, and matter's status as pure receptacle and indefiniteness. If he can establish the doctrine that not-being is essential to the account of privation, and indefiniteness to the account of matter, he will be well on the way to forging essential identity between this pair of crucial concepts, and thus to refuting Aristotle's claim that they are definitionally distinct. The passage is one of the most difficult in the entire essay. I have tried to capture its sense by adding parentheses to the translation, to identify the different "accounts" of privation and substrate. Kalligas, 324, interprets lines 17–24 and 24–28 as reformulations of (i) above, but I am inclined to take lines 24–28, with Narbonne, 340, as a reformulation of (iii). Whereas lines 17–24 keep both accounts separate, the second passage proposes that the account of privation could apply to matter, which will, of course, be Plotinus' position. On this reading of lines 24–28, the account of matter as receptacle does not apply to privation.

14, 19–20 *kind of negation of beings*: In the chapter's earlier formulations of privation, the notion was envisioned as a specifiable attribute—something that distinguished it from matter as substrate, and that could *be present in* the substrate (like non-musicality). The imaginary interlocutor now proposes that privation is just the opposite—"a negation of beings"—and therefore unable to indicate anything that could be present in the substrate. The Greek expression for *negation of beings* recalls a phrase attributed to an actual friend of Plato's called Hermodorus (see Dercyllides in Boys-Stones 4D, and Dillon *Heirs of Plato* [2003] 200f., who wrote a work *On Plato*). Hermodorus, is quoted by Dercyllides (an important Platonist of the second century CE), and reported by Plotinus' disciple Porphyry, as saying that Plato "thought of matter in terms of the unlimited and indefinite [*to apeiron kai aoriston*] . . . unfixed and shapeless . . . and 'not-being,' in the sense that it is negation of being" (*kata apophasin tou ontos*)." While these words reach us at third hand, they reflect Plotinus so closely that he probably had access to them, either directly from the source texts or via Porphyry. The likelihood becomes virtual certainty when we factor in the role that "unlimited" and "indefinite" have already played in this essay, and will continue to play still more prominently in the next two chapters. The Hermodorus passage reinforces my conviction that Plotinus regarded his refutation of Aristotle as primarily a defense of Plato, rather

than mainly a debate with contemporary Aristotelians, as many commentators seem to presume.

14, 22–23 *"not- being" because it is not "what is," but in being different [from what is] it is [nonetheless] something*: The Greek is playful in formulation but highly nuanced in order to capture the equivocal and contradictory description of privation as "a negation of beings." To say that privation lacks or negates all beings entails that privation is *not* "what is," making it "not-being." Yet, its difference from all beings endows it precisely with that alien nature as its essential identity or being. Thus privation of form would not be nothing but "something," yet supremely negative in its lack of determinacy and intelligibility. This account of privation assures its coincidence in number with the substrate that it deprives of beings or forms, while leaving it distinct in its identity as not-being from matter and substrate as receptacle. Thus it fits formulation (i) above, as required by Aristotle.

14, 25 *relation to other things*: This repeated expression, in its first occurrence, proposes "not-being" as the account of privation's negative relation to other things (probably meaning real attributes or derivatives of *logoi*). In its second occurrence, Plotinus switches its reference from the not-being of privation to the role of matter as substrate and receptacle of such beings. I follow Gerson in translating

kai . . . de (line 25) by "just as," not by "and . . . also" (as in Armstrong). The following sentence "the account of the substrate . . ." simply clarifies the previous sentence about the account of matter; it does not make a second independent point.

14, 28–30 Privation's hypothesized indefiniteness aligns it with matter, making a prima facie case for their equivalence, and thus refuting their difference according to Aristotle. Rather than settling for that conclusion, Plotinus proposes to research its cogency by determining in what sense matter and privation are essentially indefinite, and also whether, in addition, they are both essentially unlimited.

Chapter 15

Both perceptible matter and privation are essentially unlimited.

Having hypothesized, *contra* Aristotle, the equivalence of matter and privation, Plotinus seeks to consolidate this proposition by proving that these two quasi-entities share the nature of being both essentially unlimited and indefinite. He has already and repeatedly invoked "indefinite" in his accounts of both intelligible and physical matter (see Chapters 2, 4, 6, and especially 10–11). The novelty here is adjoining to indefinite the further attribute "unlimited," my translation of *apeiron* (which could also be rendered by "infinite" or "boundless"). I opted for boundless in rendering *apeiron* in Chapter 7, where the term refers to Anaximander's cosmological principle. There Plotinus, like Aristotle, uses *apeiron* in reference to magnitude. Here, however, in its contrast with "limit" (*peras*), "unlimited" is the more appropriate translation. Plotinus wants the word in the present context to cover limitlessness and indeterminacy in all range of applications, both quantitative and especially qualitative. In effect, "unlimited" and "indefinite" form a hendiadys. Rather than repeating his earlier accounts of matter's indefiniteness, Plotinus reinforces their correctness by analyzing the logical role of "the unlimited" (and therefore also that of

"the indefinite" and "privation") when it is predicated of matter. His crucial move is taking "unlimited" not as a contingent attribute of matter but as a definite description of matter's essential nature.

In focusing attention on *apeiron,* Plotinus no doubt had Plato's *Philebus* in mind, where limit and unlimited are adduced as polar constituents of reality (*Phil.* 23c), but his more immediate authority was probably Hermodorus (see above, p. 174), who reports the collocation, "unlimited and indefinite," as primary influences on Plato's notion of matter.

This chapter can seem fussy and unduly elaborate, when taken simply at face value. By the end of the essay, however, we realize that matter's character as *apeiron* is a decisive mark of its identity, and symptomatic of its complete negativity, badness. and resistance to form. Plotinus and his immediate sources could look back to the early Pythagorean table of opposites, headed by limit and unlimited, and to Plato's frequent linkage of badness to absence of measure and harmony. In his late essay I.8.3, 13–16, Plotinus encapsulates this thought, where he draws the following contrasts—measure and lack of measure, formative and formless, limit and unlimited—as ways of trying to characterize the quasi-substance of matter and its absolute badness. In another later work, VI.6.3, he views unlimitedness as an intellectual malady that the mind can try to overcome by contemplating the Good. This

background and foreground are essential preparation for reading the difficult concluding pages of the present essay.

15, 2–3 *whether the "unlimited" and "the indefinite" are attributes pertaining to another nature [than matter]*: The Greek is elliptical, as so often, and needs to be interpreted by the logical requirements of the context. In lines 10–11 Plotinus concludes that "matter [itself] *is* necessarily the unlimited" and is not unlimited merely accidentally or incidentally. We should therefore interpret the italicized sentence in a way that poses the question of how matter stands with regard to "the unlimited" and "the indefinite." Armstrong offers the following translation: "whether the unlimited and indefinite are incidentally predicated of another nature," which leaves "another nature" unexplained. Gerson's version runs: "whether unlimitedness and indefiniteness belong accidentally to matter as a distinct nature," which seems a strained construal of the Greek, and not what the context requires. As so often, MacKenna captures the main point well: "whether boundlessness and indetermination are things lodging in something other than themselves as a sort of attribute." This version correctly recognizes that the sentence is posing the question of whether unlimited and indefinite are incidental attributes or *per se* predications of matter, but the supplement that needs to be supplied after

"other than," or "another nature than," is not "themselves" but "matter." Plotinus is alluding to Aristotle, *Phys*. 3.4.203a4–5, where we are told that "some, such as the Pythagoreans and Plato, make the unlimited in itself a principle, not *as an attribute of some other thing,* but as a substance that is the unlimited itself," as Plotinus will come close to doing at the end of this chapter.

15, 4–12 This cumbrously worded argument, when the parenthesis is removed, amounts to the following syllogism: (1) Things subject to organization are necessarily unlimited; (2) matter is a thing subject to organization; (3) therefore matter is necessarily unlimited. In order to establish the premise of this modal conclusion—the necessarily unlimited nature of matter—Plotinus seems to infer (in lines, 4–7) that it is the essential role of limit to impose order on the unlimited. For this apparent truism he could of course appeal to the activity of *peras* and *apeiron* in Plato's *Philebus*. The proposition clearly applies to formative principles and the shapes that they reflect onto matter. But, as we learned in Chapter 5 (and will be forcefully reminded in Chapter 16), physical matter as such never becomes actually organized and receptive of limits; it merely gives the appearance of attaining such order.

15, 12–17 Plotinus now reinforces the essential, non-incidental, status of matter's unlimitedness by three

further arguments. First, if "the unlimited" were merely an attribute (*sumbainon*), it would be a "formative principle" (*logos*), meaning that it would confer a definite "limit" on matter and thus negate itself. Secondly, "unlimited" could only become an attribute of something previously limited, which would equally contradict the unlimited nature of matter. Thirdly, if "unlimited" were to enter previously limited matter, it would lose its own unlimited nature. We should probably take Aristotle to be the implicit target of these arguments. Aristotelian matter has no nature as such: it is neither limited nor unlimited, identifiable only contextually, not an entity as such, and characterizable neither positively nor negatively (cf. *Metaph.* 7.3.1029a20–26, see p. 19 above text C). Plotinus, by contrast, treats matter as describable by its antithesis to his own ontological categories: it *is* indefinite and *unlimited* and it *is* not-being. We see this procedure most clearly and pointedly in his later essay III.6.7, 7–9, where matter is "neither soul nor intellect nor life nor form nor formative principle nor limit—for it is unlimitedness (*apeiria*)—nor power."

15, 12 *The attribute of anything must be a formative principle [logos]*: I have not found any exact parallel for this statement. We should probably interpret it by reference to the well-attested notion that physical qualities and quantities—here referred to by *to sumbainon*—are

transmissions of Intellect's Forms into matter by the mediation of Soul's *logos*; see Rist, *Plotinus* (1967), ch. 7, and cf. III.6.16. Plotinus continues to contrast *logos* with matter in the last lines of the chapter.

15, 15–16 *the unlimited will lose its nature if it approaches what is limited*: The Greek verb *apolei* can mean either "will lose," as I take the word's sense to be here, or "will destroy." Most translators strangely choose the latter. Thus Armstrong renders the sentence: "The unlimited when it comes to that which is limited will destroy its nature," and in Gerson similarly we get: "When unlimitedness approaches what has been limited it destroys its nature." The problem with these versions is that they make no sense of the context. What the argument requires is not a reason for unlimitedness to destroy anything, but an explanation of why unlimitedness cannot be predicated of matter merely incidentally. The required explanation is that unlimitedness would lose its essential nature by becoming an attribute of something else. MacKenna fully grasps the required sense in his somewhat free translation: "Indefiniteness entering as an attribute into the definite must cease to be indefinite." The same idea is expressed in Chapter 16, lines 8–9, where *apolei*, now meaning "will destroy," describes the effect that the approach of a limit might have on the unlimited. The thought and the terminology closely recall Socrates' celebrated argument

in *Phaedo* 103d that "heat, on the approach of cold, must either withdraw or be destroyed" (see above, p. 172). At III.6.11, 26 Plotinus uses *apolei* with the required sense "will lose," where he writes: "If matter became beautiful it will lose its nature as matter, particularly so if it was not incidentally ugly." The parallel to our present sentence is precise, both terminologically and conceptually. I have wondered whether we should emend the pronoun *autou* in line 16 to the reflexive *hautou*. The figurative language, especially the image of qualities' or limits' "approaching" (*prosienai*) matter and putting it at risk, is repeated in Chapter 16, lines 5–11.

15, 17–28 Here Plotinus unexpectedly draws support from the intelligible world for matter's unlimitedness by reminding us that physical matter, in its nature as substrate, has intelligible matter as its archetype there (see Chapter 4, lines 7–9, and cf. III.5.6, 44 where "intelligible matter" is posited to explain the source of the instrument that gives rise to corporeal matter). For the only time in the essay Plotinus refers directly to the One, though he alluded to it at the end of Chapter 5 by mention of "the First." In crediting the One as "maker" of unlimitedness, Plotinus is careful not to say that *apeiria* "is present" in it. (The One is subject to no internal or external limitations; see Bussanich [1996], 44, on its "infinite power to generate the intelligible world.") In Chapter 5 intelligible matter

has "Otherness," i.e., the Indefinite Dyad, as its proximate source. When (non-temporally) issuing from the One, the Dyad or Otherness is initially "undefined"; it only acquires definition and limit and goodness when it turns back to the One. Plotinus now builds on this ontological scheme by treating physical matter as an "image" of the Indefinite Dyad in its pre-formed stage, when it constitutes simply Otherness or essential unlimitedness as such. Physical states and qualities according to Platonism fall short of their intelligible sources as a rule (think of the *Phaedo's* Equality itself or the *Symposium's* peerless Beauty), but Plotinus treats unlimitedness as an exception to this general principle. "The further an image has escaped from being and truth, the more unlimited it is"; consequently, the unlimitedness of physical matter is "more truly unlimited" than that of the Otherness that is its intelligible counterpart and source. There is clearly something fishy about this inference, but I refrain from spelling out where it goes wrong. Having brought the intelligible world back into his discussion, Plotinus takes the opportunity to remind his readers that the two matters differ not only in their status as original and image but also in their comparative value. Thus he prepares for the stark badness of matter that he will emphasize in the final chapter.

15, 26 *is unlimited [only] as an image*: Elaborating on the reversal of the general principle that images are less true

and less real than their sources, Plotinus argues that the relation of intelligible unlimitedness to physical matter is *like* that of image to original, rather than of original to image. The former is superior to the latter in value and reality, because it belongs to the intelligible realm, but it is not unlimited as a being or in its nature, whereas physical matter, which "has escaped from being and truth and sunk into the very nature of image," *is more truly unlimited*. Once again MacKenna captures the thought excellently with his free translation: "The Indeterminate in the Intellectual Realm, where there is truer being, might almost be called an Image of Indefiniteness."

15, 28–37 *Are, then, the unlimited [subject] and essential unlimitedness the same?*: The question had come up in Aristotle, *Physics* 3.5.204a23, in a context where Aristotle contests the Pythagorean/Platonic view that there is a self-subsistent Infinite or Unlimited: "Essential unlimitedness and unlimited are the same if the unlimited is a substance and not predicated of an underlying subject (or substrate)." In my translation I insert [subject] after "the unlimited" in lines 29 and 33, to make it clear that the phrase "the unlimited" doesn't simply denote "unlimitedness" (the rendering in Gerson). Plotinus is not asking whether "unlimitedness and the essence of unlimitedness are identical," but whether matter in its nature as "*the* unlimited" is such.

Why does Plotinus advert to the issue here? He wants to prove that matter is intrinsically unlimited, but he has just asserted that it cannot be self-subsistent because it is derived from such a being, namely the Indefinite Dyad. Therefore, from that perspective, matter cannot be identical to essential unlimitedness since it owes its unlimited nature to the "formative principle," and is the subject of the predicate unlimited (quoting Aristotle). Yet, if we focus simply on the nature of matter, the distinction between its unlimitedness and essential unlimitedness could seem moot. Plotinus solves this problem by a piece of precarious verbal juggling. Matter cannot receive essential unlimitedness without becoming defined accordingly and hence losing its special character. Hence we should give it a different name, "unlimited of itself." Using the military metaphor of "organizational opposition" (*antitaxis*), and recalling his contrast between organizations and organizing agents (lines 5-7, Plotinus envisions matter and its formative principle(s) as confronting one another like opposing armies, fighting over the principle of unlimitedness. I gratefully take over the translation "organizational opposition" from Gerson.

In these lines Plotinus repeatedly contrasts matter with *logos*, which I translate here, as I do elsewhere, by "formative principle." In the context, or at least the initial context, *logos* must refer to the intelligible archetype of unlimitedness. By the end of the section, however, a case

can be made for thinking that the word refers to formative principle in general, whose role is to reflect limit on the unlimited. MacKenna seems to adumbrate this reading in his version of the last two lines of the chapter: "Reason is Reason and nothing else, just as Matter, opposed by its indeterminateness to Reason, is Indeterminateness and nothing else." I would like to leave the interpretation of *logos* open. As the Greek stands, it seems unlikely that *logos* only refers here to intelligible unlimitedness. We should probably interpret it as the collective name for the defined Beings that are Plotinus' standard referents of *logos*, as he makes evident in lines 2–3 of the ensuing chapter.

15, 34 *"unlimited of itself"*: At 1.8.3, 30 "the nature of badness" entails the existence of something intrinsically unlimited and intrinsically formless.

Chapter 16

As other than definite being, perceptible matter is the amorphous receptacle of limit, and antithetical to everything good, including intelligible matter.

Physical matter, like its intelligible counterpart, originates from Otherness, but unlike the latter it takes on no determinate form. In its nature as privation, this matter is only receptive and never possessive. The argument continues and concludes the rejoinder to Aristotle's doctrine that matter's acquisition of form replaces its erstwhile privation. Plotinus inverts this thesis, arguing that matter's privative nature becomes fully actual by the advent of "limits." For they confirm its poverty and lack. As such, physical matter always *is* entirely bad and other than being.

16, 1 *Is matter, then, the same as Otherness?*: The question has been hovering already. Otherness (*heterotês*) or Difference, naming one of Plato's five "greatest kinds," first came up at the end of Chapter 5, in the genealogy of intelligible matter. That principle owes its origin to the "procession" of the Indefinite Dyad, there called Otherness, from the One. Plotinus recurs to Otherness in Chapter 13, to indicate that physical matter is not Otherness as such but is "other" derivatively and as "merely other." While

the two "matters" are conceptually and metaphysically akin in their nature as substrates or pure receptacles, they differ not only as archetype and image (Chapter 15), but also as diametrically opposite in value. Intelligible matter, once it "reverts" to its source in the One, becomes good and defined. Physical matter, as we will shortly learn, is irremediably bad. Its otherness consists in its complete and permanent lack of any definite quality, making it "other than" all determinate beings, recalling the end of Chapter 13.

Plato (*Sophist* 258a–e) had drawn a sharp distinction between the part of Otherness" that marks absolute not-being or non-existence, and the part of Otherness that simply indicates difference between two *beings* without prejudice to their status as fully real entities: "The reciprocal opposition (*antithesis*) between one part of the nature of *otherness* and the nature of *being* is as much being (*ousia*) as *being* itself, since what it signifies is not the *contrary* of being, but simply something *different* from being." Plotinus clearly has this text in mind here, but far from parroting it, he draws on it to make two quite distinct points. On the one hand, he wants to relate otherness, in the sense of "being different from," to physical matter's status as privation, i.e., its "not having" some property or properties, and thus being "other than" them. But Plotinus also rejects allocation of *being* to matter's otherness by treating it not only as a mark of matter's difference from all other

existing things, its "not being any of them," but also its being "organizationally opposed to the things that are beings strictly, namely the formative principles" (recall Chapter 15, lines 32–35). Physical matter's otherness thus situates it in a twilight zone. It is predicatively other, in its difference from other beings, but also substantively other, in its lack of the reality that formative principles confer. Yet its otherness in both senses confirms its existential identity as privation, "antithesis to the things that exist in determinate form." For further discussion see O'Brien (1996).

From this point until the end of the chapter Plotinus develops his final account of matter by means of an argument that systematically takes issue with Aristotle's account of privation in *Physics* 1.9; see Noble (2013), 258–262.

16, 5 *Will privation, then, be destroyed by the approach of what it is the privation of?*: Reiterating the language of Chapter 15, 15–16, the question invites response to Aristotle's claim (192a26–27) that when matter acquires the form contrary to the privation, the privation will cease to exist as an *actual* condition. Plotinus bases his rejoinder on the permanent and essential identity of matter and privation, reasons for and against which he explored in Chapter 14. His present argument has two equivalent premises: (1) When matter receives an acquisition—literally

a "having" (*hexis*)—it does not become assimilated to the acquisition, but maintains its identity as privation; and (2) as recipient of a limit (or form), matter as such retains its essential nature as completely unlimited. The argument is paradoxical if we think of matter as a potentially full receptacle, but in this essay Plotinus has hitherto withheld Aristotelian potentiality from matter. Rather than backing away from the paradox, Plotinus will seemingly revel in it as the chapter continues. First, however, he raises the following objection, based upon his own postulate (from the previous chapter's conclusion), that matter/privation is "unlimited of itself," and not just incidentally.

16, 8 *How could the approach of a limit not destroy the nature of "the unlimited" itself* (*i.e., matter)?*: The crucial words are "nature" and "itself." If matter is unlimited *of itself* and *by its nature* (as already postulated), it surely *cannot*, on pain of egregious self-contradiction, admit an approaching limit (that is, become limited or defined) and remain the privation of limit? (The argument requires retention of the MS reading "not," which some editors have deleted.) But if matter does not admit any limits or determinations, another self-contradiction looms, namely the incompatibility between matter's having the nature of a receptacle and its not receiving anything. Plotinus will attempt to resolve this dilemma in later *Enneads* where he expounds matter's essence as a never actualized

potentiality (II.5.5, 6–8) and as never being affected by the form copies that are reflected upon it (III.6.7–9). The imagery of "approach" and "destroy" originates in Plato's *Phaedo* (see above, p. 172), where Socrates explains that two things or qualities which are opposite to one another cannot merge and both remain intact.

16, 10 *If it were something [simply] unlimited in quantity*: In this sentence Plotinus seems to make a partial concession to the challenge mooted in the previous lines. The phrase "in quantity" (*kata to poson*) means "in a strictly quantitative way," as in numerical measurement (VI. 3.11, 7). Matter's unlimitedness extends to magnitude, but what it chiefly denotes for Plotinus, like Aristotle's privation, is absence of form or quality. To make this crystal clear, I insert "[simply]" before "unlimited in quantity," to indicate that this apparent concession has no bearing on matter's unlimitedness in quality. As to quantity, I think this sentence should be interpreted counterfactually. If there were such things as free-floating magnitudes, we might imagine that they could "unfold" matter into a certain size (see Chapter 9, 12–13), but magnitude does not come to matter like that. Magnitude is always a function of the size that formative principles contribute to the nature of the thing in question (Chapter 11, 19–21). Hence we may conclude that this challenge does not present a problem different from those already raised and answered

concerning matter's absolute preservation of its unlimited status in general, even when it encounters formative principles.

16, 11–15 O'Brien (1996), 180, aptly states the gist of this strange passage: "Plotinus concludes that the advent of form confirms, paradoxically, the absence of form. The arrival of form, far from ousting the privation, 'preserves' the privation 'in its existence.' The privation achieves 'actualisation' and 'perfection' by the very presence of the form of which it is—and remains—the privation." As O'Brien goes on to remark, Plotinus puts Aristotle's concept of privation to entirely different purposes from its original function of explaining how a persisting substrate can change from one form into another. In Plotinus, for whom change is purely empirical and absent from the intelligible world, privation persists throughout any apparent change because matter as such can never undergo any real transformation. Yet, some of Aristotle's words lurk behind this passage.

In his criticism of the Platonists for allegedly misidentifying privation with matter = substrate (*Physics* 1.9, 192a3–24), Aristotle charges them with treating privation and matter as a unitary and harmful principle (*kakopoion*): they have failed to see that matter itself is only incidentally privation, or absence of form. (For full discussion of Aristotle's criticism and its Platonic background, see

Cherniss (1944), Chapter 2, "The Material Substrate.") According to Aristotle, matter yearns to achieve the positive contrary of privation, which he calls "the divine and the good." By way of illustration Aristotle cites the desire of ugliness for beauty and the female's desire for the male. He thus, in the words of Ross (1936), 498, treats ugliness and female as "concomitants" of the matter that strives after form, the contrary of privation. This is one of the most bizarre passages in the whole Aristotelian corpus; for taken at face value, it identifies female sexuality with the transgender desire to become male! (Aristotle's chapter is elaborately paraphrased by Calcidius 286, who rejects the identity of matter with privation, 288, and thus saves matter itself from being intrinsically bad.)

We need not pursue Aristotle's unfortunate sexism. Plotinus picks up the "female" example but turns it around in a more physiologically plausible way. (The Greek text at line 14 is defective, but we can be confident that the translation I offer captures the essence of Plotinus' meaning.) Just as the unsown field (the matter's privation) obtains form (germination) when it is sown, so the pre-pregnant female obtains form (conception) when she is impregnated. By using Aristotle's term *energeia*, meaning "actuality" or "activity," Plotinus seems to treat "the approach of limit" (form), illustrated by sowing and impregnation, as the *actualization* of the matter's potentiality. So far

so good, or so much better than Aristotle's seemingly transgender female.

But in that case, the privation (the unsown field and the pre-pregnant female) should now disappear, whereas Plotinus' point is just the opposite—the preservation of the privation after the arrival of the form. Besides, at least in this essay, Plotinus never explicitly attributes potentiality to matter. The thought, as O'Brien (1996) remarks, is certainly paradoxical. But before we simply settle for that, we should factor in the next line's challenging question: "So must matter be bad by participating in good?" The formulation and interpretation of the question (on which more below) return us to the Aristotelian context concerning matter's yearning to replace privation with its contrary form ("the divine and the good"). Plotinian forms are indeed divine and good, including the formative principles that project shape and determination onto matter. Hence, if Plotinus were an Aristotelian, he should say that matter cannot be bad by participating in good, that is to say, by being overlaid with forms.

Plotinus emphatically disagrees, or rather, he responds to the question about matter by detaching matter's badness (i.e., its privation) from its participation in good. Matter is not bad *because* it participates in good (which would be an absurd contradiction); it is bad intrinsically, and it stays bad, or even becomes worse, when it serves as the substrate and receptacle of form. Plotinus acknowledges

the common-sense notion that sowing perfects the field, as it were, and conception similarly the female. But the field's receptivity to germination and that of the female for conception not only do not cease with these introductions of form, they leave the field and the female as they were at the onset—merely passive recipients. The more the field germinates or the more the female conceives, the more evident it is (or may seem) that the function of matter is not to *have* form but only to *receive* form. Females, according to Aristotelian notions of conception (which Plotinus unfortunately seems to accept), contribute mainly matter to the onset and development of conception. The form of the animal offspring comes from the male.

By analogy with the field and the female, Plotinian matter in its relation to form is and remains entirely passive. In Plotinian terminology and metaphysics this means that matter, itself, is always privation. By saying that "the thing becomes more what it [already] is," he seems to mean that: just as sowing and pregnancy do not change the natures of the field and the female but simply consolidate and confirm their nature as viable receptacles, so matter is perfected, as it were, by simply receiving forms without being assimilated to them. The thought exactly recalls Plato's description of the receptacle as "receiving all things, *but never in any way taking on any characteristic similar to any of the things that enter*" (*Timaeus* 50b–c).

16, 16 *So must matter be bad by participating in good?*: Additional comments on this difficult sentence are in order. The first words are the interrogative particle *ar' oun*, which can introduce a question expecting either an affirmative answer or a negative one. Here it is clear from what follows that the expected response is No. As will be said in the next sentence, matter's badness has nothing to do with its participation in good; it is due to its irremediable privation or lack of goodness. MacKenna renders the question: "Must not matter owe its evil to having in some degree participated in good?" His addition "in some degree" registers the clear, though unstated, implication that matter's "participation in good" must be at best equivocal.

The word for "participating" (*metalambanousa*) belongs to a verb which is one of Plato's standard expressions for the way things can become qualified by their relation to a Form. Plotinus uses the verb very frequently, attaching it, as he does here, to "good" (*agathon*) in I.7.1, 10 and III.6.11, 29), and to "form" (*eidos*) in 1.2.2, 22. Frequently Greek participles are attached to nouns, as this one is here, without explicit indication of their logical force. In the present case, "participating" could be conditional "(if"), which is Gerson's reading, or temporal ("when"), or concessive ("though"), or causal ("because"), which Narbonne and Armstrong choose), or finally instrumental,

which I have opted for with my translation "by participating." I interpret the phrase as follows.

As the receptacle of forms, or at least positive forms, matter unavoidably "participates in good." Yet, that participation neither causes nor ameliorates matter's badness. Rather, the participation has absolutely no influence on matter's intrinsic privation, though it draws attention to it by way of antithesis. If matter were intrinsically good or susceptible to good, it would not be amenable to participation. But, as things are, matter is always completely lifeless and inert. It has no agency or volition; it participates in good, in spite of itself. The participation comes to it from form, and confirms matter's identity as purely amorphous and receptive. Hence matter is "not bad by participating in good," but because its perpetual need or lack of goodness can never be made up. For extended discussion of the way matter participates in good without becoming in any way less bad, see III.6.11, 24–47, where Plotinus anachronistically attributes the doctrine to Plato. Moderatus, whose works *On matter* seem to have influenced Plotinus strongly, supposed that matter, in spite of its badness "is constrained by the good, and cannot escape its limits" (Boys-Stones 4B, 118; see above p. 22 text L).

16, 17 *was [already] in need*: Matter's badness, due to privation, is a permanent condition. It is expressed here by the so-called gnomic aorist of the Greek verb. I insert

"[already]" in the translation, to indicate the timelessness of the neediness. Proclus strongly dissented from Plotinus on the badness of matter: see Opsomer (2001).

16, 18–19 *intermediate between bad and good*: Plotinus acknowledges elsewhere that neutrality is a possible condition in the spectrum of value (*adiaphoros* in Greek, cf.V.8.2, 29), and he will have known that this was the status of Stoic matter (see Numenius in Boys-Stones 5R). There is no "form" of badness (V.9.10, 18) because badness is the outcome of "need, privation, and lack"; and of matter's "bad luck"! Nonetheless, the good and the bad constitute not only two extremes but are such that, at the last and lowest level, "the bad things are opposed to the good with nothing in between" (VI.7.23, 10–14).

16, 20 *in a state of poverty, or because it is poverty*: In I. 8.3, 16 Plotinus concludes a description of matter's deficiency with the words "complete poverty." Plato (*Symposium* 203c) had mythologically pictured Love's mother as *Penia* (Poverty). Plotinus, in his elaborate interpretation of the story (III.5), probably written much later than the present essay, identifies Plato's *Penia* with matter, "because of matter's complete indigence" (ibid. section 9).

16, 22 *poverty of thought, poverty of virtue*: Although Plotinus uses ethical terms in characterizing the badness

(*kakon*) of matter, including its privation of virtue (*aretê*), he does not here (or anywhere else, I think) write of matter's vice or evil, using the noun *kakia*. He tends to reserve this word for human depravity (see I.8.4, 10 and passim). I presume that this reticence is deliberate. Matter is the worst and ugliest of things, because it lacks all vestige of good or form; but it is not devilish or deliberately evil. In one of his mature works (VI.7.28, 1–12), Plotinus offers a thought-experiment—if matter were conscious and capable of desire, would it not wish for its own good, and for form and being? Yet, that can be only a dream, because matter would, then, have to desire its own destruction, sunk into complete darkness, as it already is (I.8.13, 17). Plotinus seems to me to verge on pathos rather than horror in these descriptions.

16, 25–27 Plotinus concludes the essay with a concise comparison and contrast of the two matters, recalling Chapter 5. The construction of the Greek proceeds in parallel, to indicate the metaphysical gap between the two worlds: (i) "The matter of the intelligible world is *Being*; for what precedes it is beyond *being*"; (ii) "Here, however, it is *being* that precedes matter"; (iii) Therefore the matter here is not *being*, *being* other, and beyond the beauty of its *being*." As the italicized words indicate, Plotinus repeats the word for "being" (the Greek participles *on* and *ontos*) six times. The transmitted text of the words that I

translate "beyond the beauty of its being" is grammatically and semantically difficult. There are many suggested corrections, the least likely of which involves changing *kaloi,* "beautiful," to *kakoi,* "bad"! The difficult word is not *kaloi* but *pros*, a preposition that, with the dative case as here, should mean "in addition to." Seidel cleverly conjectured *pros to katô*. If *pros to katô tou ontos,* could simply mean "below being," the phrase would neatly balance the remark that what precedes intelligible matter is "beyond Being." Unfortunately, *pros to katô* would naturally mean "towards what is below," as a direction of motion, which is not what the context requires. That is how Plotinus uses the expression elsewhere (e.g., I.1.12, 25 and I.6.5, 38). The conjecture also presumes an implausibly complex error by the medieval copyist. I have wondered about changing *pros* to *proseti*, yielding the sense: "being different, *besides*, from the beauty of being," referring to perceptible beauty (as in I.6.2–3). Plotinus uses *proseti* in Chapter 10, line 19, as an adverb with this sense.

16, 26 *beyond Being*: The phrase *epekeina ontos* alludes to Plato's famous and cryptic statement that the Form of the Good transcends being (*ousia*), *Republic* 6.508b. Plotinus frequently uses the expression, e.g., V.4.2, 42.

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